

Fantastic FOUR

REWRITE BY

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BASED ON THE MARVEL COMICS
CHARACTERS CREATED BY

Stan Lee & Jack Kirby

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FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNTAIN STREAM - DAY

Towering evergreens, purple snow-capped mountains, a burbling stream: nature at its most majestic. At the edge of the stream sits the richest man in the world - doughy, bespectacled RAYMOND PACE - in a chaise longue, in his bathrobe, sipping a tropical cocktail and fiddling with a hand-held computer device. FRISKY DEER bound past in a nearby glade.

There's only one jarring element in the whole idyllic vista: A STOCK TICKER runs along the bottom of the landscape, right at ground level . . .

ROBOTIC VOICE [v.o.]

Reed - Richards - calling.

PACE hits a key. A two-dimensional WINDOW opens up in the middle of the sky overhead . . . and the grainy image of REED RICHARDS appears.

REED

How about it, Ray? Want to change the world?

REED, late thirties, is driven, brilliant, a touch naïve. He's made five fortunes and lost them all. Just now he's extremely nervous, and the forced note of bravado in his voice can't quite conceal it.

REED

It's Mars, Ray. Another planet. A chance like this might not come along again.

PACE

I dunno, Reed. Colonizing Mars . . . long-term, it's great. But by the time we see a profit, we'll all be in the geezer ward.

REED

Ray . . . It's not about profits. It's about the destiny of the human race.

PACE

With me, Reed, it's also kind of about profits.

REED

I need an answer. I have other investors . . .

PACE

If that was true, you wouldn't be talking to me.

REED squirms visibly. He's not what you'd call a born poker player.

PACE

Okay, here's the deal. I'll bail you out on this Mars thing. In exchange . . . I get one-half of your brain.

REED

What?!?

PACE

Fifty percent of R² Technologies. Halfsies on everything you invent from now on.

REED

Well, Jesus, Ray, I . . . can I have a day or two to think about it?

PACE

Nope.

REED

Okay, it's a deal.

PACE

Thank youuu . . .

PACE abruptly terminates the call. The little window with REED's face VANISHES with an audible BLIP. PACE punches his keyboard -

PACE

Find Sue Storm. See if she's available for a weekend trip - to outer space.

Now he points his remote at the MOUNTAIN VISTA. It VANISHES - and is instantly replaced by the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel!

PACE frowns. Not quite what he was looking for. He hits the remote, and his virtual environment changes again -

- to an OUTER SPACE view. Now PACE and his chaise longue seem to be floating in orbit above Mars. He activates his STOCK TICKER and settles back with a satisfied grin.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PRIVATE AIRSTRIP - DAY

REPORTERS and CAMERA CREWS swarming outside a STORM FENCE. In the distance, across the tarmac, is a futuristic version of a space shuttle - the POGO PLANE - sitting atop a mile-long stretch of RAILROAD TRACK.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - GANTRY PLATFORM

A FLIGHT CREW readies the shuttle. On the boarding platform we find REED and BEN GRIMM – burly, pugnacious, REED's oldest friend and most trusted employee. BEN is waving sourly at the cameras.

BEN

He leaked it, the bum. 'Course, it is quite a story . . . Reed Richards Finally Sells Out.

REED

Ben, it's the only way to keep the dream alive. Without Pace I'm broke in three months.

BEN

You've been broke a dozen times. Never stopped you before. – So who's this flunky we're supposed to show around?

REED

Storm. Sue Storm. And watch it, okay? One word from her and the whole deal crashes.

A company limo pulls up on the tarmac, and a WOMAN gets out. BEN lifts a pair of binoculars to check her out.

BEN

Whoa . . . nice flunky.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - ON SUE STORM

Thirty, blonde, the brains behind PACE's high-tech empire. She's one of those rare people who have somehow gotten extremely beautiful without ever realizing it. BEN and REED are mesmerized by the mere sight of her as she ascends the metal stairway to the boarding platform.

Before REED can speak she grabs his hand and pumps it.

SUE

Mr. Richards. I can't believe it. This is such an honor for me. I've followed your work for years. I wrote my dissertation on your reasearch into gallium arsenide as a medium for downloadable consciousness –

BEN

What a coincidence. Me too!

REED

Ms. Storm, this is our pilot, Ben Grimm.

SUE

I'm sorry. I'm talking too much. I'm . . .

(three seconds of silence)

Hi, Mr. Grimm. I just wanted to say, this inspection tour is a formality, my goal is to be completely . . . invisible.

REED

I thought there were two in your party.

SUE

Oh. My brother Johnny. He's interested in aeronautical engineering. And a great, great great admirer of yours.

BEN

Excuse me, ma'am - did you say Johnny? Johnny Storm? -- Blond kid?

SUE

Yes. Do you know him?

BEN

. . . Slightly.

REED watches this exchange with concern. He pulls BEN aside -

REED

What the hell is this about?

BEN

I know this kid, Reed. He's a punk. I . . .

(swallowing hard)

I busted him out of the Blue Angels.

REED

Her brother?? You busted - well - is there some kind of bad blood between you?

BEN

Apart from busting him out of the Blue Angels?

In the distance, ROCK MUSIC - followed by the sudden blare of SECURITY ALARMS. BEN lifts his binoculars, and sees:

TIGHT CLOSEUP - JOHNNY STORM

24 going on 16, blond, a congenital hellraiser. He's leaning over to kiss a beautiful REDHEADED WOMAN. Both their faces are BOUNCING like crazy - and just as their lips meet, the CAMERA PULLS BACK . . .

EXT. LAUNCH PAD - THAT MOMENT - DAY

... revealing that the two of them are in SEPARATE VEHICLES: JOHNNY on a motorcycle, and the REDHEAD in the back seat of an open convertible. They're tearing across the blacktop at 65 MPH, with a trio of SECURITY JEEPS in hot pursuit.

With a rebel yell, JOHNNY peels out and DOES A WHEELIE. He aims for the gantry, GUNS IT, then hits the brakes - executing a 270-degree burning rubber SPIN at the gantry base. He waves at SUE ...

JOHNNY
HIYA, SIS!

She doesn't see him. She's covering her face in embarrassment.

SUE

Dr. Richards, I am really mortified about this.

BEN

We gotta upgrade our security.

REED just sputters, wondering what to say. Down below, a JEEP has pulled up alongside JOHNNY's motorcycle, and two GUARDS have jumped out to grab him by either arm. He barely seems to notice.

JOHNNY

Hey, Sue, I told the guys they could come along. They've never seen a Pogo launch.

He points back to the CONVERTIBLE, which has been stopped by the other two jeeps. Apart from the REDHEAD, it contains two overage FRAT-BOY TYPES, their DATES, and a BEER COOLER.

GUARD I

What should we do with him, Dr. Richards?

REED

It's all a misunderstanding. Mr. Storm is with our flight party. He's, uh -

JOHNNY

- running late.

The GUARDS let JOHNNY go. He starts up the gantry to the platform.

REED

(gallantly, to SUE)

Not a problem. Don't even think about it.

As JOHNNY reaches the boarding platform, SUE grabs him and whispers:

SUE

You are so . . . severely . . . dead.
(forcing a smile)

Dr. Richards, Johnny Storm. And this is -

At the sight of BEN he throws open his arms and staggers forward, as if he expects a big old bear hug. BEN glowers at him coldly.

JOHNNY

Majorrrrrr - ! No hug? Gimme a hug!!

BEN looks at REED. Who looks at SUE. Who looks at JOHNNY.

REED

. . . I'll show you where we keep the flight suits.

He leads her inside. BEN and JOHNNY linger behind a moment.

BEN

Pretty Boy Storm. I didn't know Pace was hiring underwear models.

JOHNNY

I don't work for Pace.

BEN

Then what exactly are you doing here?

JOHNNY

Didn't you hear? When the deal goes through, I get your job.

BEN sputters. JOHNNY blows a kiss to the REDHEAD in the convertible, and then - as he's entering the ship - blows another to BEN.

INT. POGO PLANE - COCKPIT - DAY

The four travelers in bulky ASTRONAUT'S SUITS, strapped into their seats. SECONDS TICK OFF on the console: 00:00:02 . . . 00:00:01 . . .

BEN

Igniting lateral thrusters.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - ON POGO PLANE - THAT MOMENT

FIRE BELCHES from the rear of the shuttle. It glides along the rails . . .

INT. POGO PLANE - THAT MOMENT

400 MPH. 420. 440. The passengers are quivering like jelly in their seats, their faces stretching back into a three-G rictus.

JOHNNY
F-f-f-lam-m-m-m-me ONNN!!!

EXT. POGO PLANE - THAT MOMENT

A trio of AFTERBURNERS kick in - giving the ship the last bit of thrust it needs to take off at the end of the upwardly curving rails -

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. POGO PLANE - OUTER SPACE

The afterburners die out, and - as the Pogo Plane pulls AWAY FROM CAMERA - we find ourselves in the midst of vast starry SPACE, bound for a looming ORBITAL STATION.

The *Bellerophon IV* looks like a great spoked WHEEL, with a succession of smaller wheels arranged concentrically inside it. Its constant rotation creates artificial gravity on the outer circumference.

The flat sides of the wheel are festooned with SOLAR POWER PANELS, which look like small inverted umbrellas. The station is still under construction - right now it looks about two-thirds done.

INT. POGO PLANE - COCKPIT - THAT MOMENT

The SAME VIEW is available to our passengers through the canopy of the plane. SUE smiles at REED.

SUE
I can't believe I'm seeing it. It looks just like that sketch you did in *The Third Millenium*.

REED
The Third Millenium?? That one's been out of print for at least a decade.

SUE
It's like a road map to the future. Like you've seen what the rest of us can only imagine.
(beat)
Do all your dreams come true?

The smile she flashes leaves him pretty much speechless. Her face is framed against a field of stars, and the sight of it is making REED drunk.

REED
In some areas, yes . . .

Up front: BEN at the console, JOHNNY riding shotgun. JOHNNY is

drinking soda from a SOFT-PAK. He amuses himself by squeezing liquid out through the straw - the globules just HANG THERE in midair.

BEN

First time in zero-gravity, huh?

JOHNNY

No, I just like the little bubbles.

He squirts a few at BEN, who bats them away like a swarm of gnats.

BEN

What do you want to be when you grow up?

JOHNNY

Ugly and stupid like Major Ben. So what's the deal - you sit here and pick your nose while the computer does the flying for you?

BEN eyes him for a moment. He reaches over and FLIPS OFF a couple of switches on the console. Then he opens a RADIO MIKE . . .

BEN

Bellerophon Four, this is Pogo Alpha Niner. We have a malfunctioning subroutine. I will be docking on manual . . .

ATC [o.s.; filter]

Roger on that, Pogo Alpha Niner.

REED shoots a look of concern at SUE. He leans forward.

REED

Ben, did I hear -

BEN

It's nothing, Reed. Entirely under control.

The DOCKING BAY is dead ahead - a big irregular SOCKET, designed to precisely accommodate the contours of the Pogo Plane. If your approach is off by more than a couple of degrees, you don't dock . . . you CRASH.

As REED and SUE watch, the entire orbital station seems to ROTATE 90 DEGREES on its axis - from horizontal to vertical . . .

INT. ORBITAL STATION - DOCKING COMMAND - THAT MOMENT

Two extremely edgy AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS look on with mounting dread as the POGO PLANE approaches. It's mere seconds away from docking . . . and BEN is executing a full 360° BARREL ROLL!

INT. POGO PLANE - THAT MOMENT

Now the orbital station appears to be UPSIDE DOWN - and it's coming up fast. Even JOHNNY is nervous. He glances back at SUE, who glances at REED, who glances at BEN - all of them wondering just how scared to get.

BEN

Y'see, kid, the thing about space flight . . . is there's no up and down. It's free fall. Like being in a permanent tailspin. Lose track of your visual axes, and you . . . are . . . screwed.

INT. DOCKING COMMAND - THAT MOMENT

BOTH ATC's cover their eyes. There's no way he can make it.

EXT. ORBITAL STATION - THAT MOMENT

With roughly a foot to spare, the Pogo plane RIGHTS ITSELF and glides into the docking bay with a satisfying CLICK.

INT. POGO PLANE - THAT MOMENT

SIGHS OF RELIEF. BEN glares at JOHNNY, awaiting comment.

JOHNNY

Okay, I admit - that was smooth.

BEN

Smooth, my ass. That was dainty.

REED

(relieved; to SUE)

Well. Welcome to the Bellerophon IV.

An AIRTIGHT SEAL forms around the plane and the docking bay begins to repressurize. BEN and REED unzip their bulky astronaut gear.

SUE

Is there a place to change . . . ?

REED

We get sudden temperature shifts up here. I'd advise you to stay in your thermal suit.

The THERMAL SUITS - worn *underneath* the astronaut suits - are made of a thin, clingy fabric, in an oddly familiar shade of blue . . .

INT. DOCKING BAY - A MOMENT LATER

The HATCH POPS on the Pogo Plane, and our four passengers step out in blue THERMAL SUITS emblazoned with the stylized "4" logo of the Bellerophon IV - our first (premature) glimpse of the Fantastic Four.

They're greeted by a round of WHOOPS and APPLAUSE from the CREW MEMBERS in the docking bay, who are hugely impressed that they managed to survive the docking process.

ALL THE CREW MEMBERS are wearing blue thermal suits as well. The Fantastic Four are now the Fantastic Eight or Ten.

INT. ORBITAL STATION - NIGHT

REED and SUE at a wall of VIDEO MONITORS, each screen showing a live feed from a different part of the station. One shows a CONSTRUCTION TEAM in spacesuits, hard at work on the exterior of the station.

REED

There's zero gravity at the hub of the wheel . . .
that's where we'll build the transport ships
when the time comes. A guy like Ben here
could lift a six-ton engine block with one hand.

BEN

(to SUE)

So could you, for that matter.

SUE

Thanks, I've been working out. - Raymond told
me you had an experimental nanotech lab?

BEN

That's von Doom's little kingdom.

SUE

"von Doom"?

REED

Victor Vandam. The boys call him von Doom -

BEN

Because he's such a cheerful little buttercup.

REED

Your boss has been trying to hire him away for
years.

REED escorts SUE down the corridor. BEN and JOHNNY fall in behind them. BEN pops an unlit Montecristo into his mouth and decides that

SUE, seen from behind in a clingy thermal suit, is pleasing to the eye.
Unfortunately, JOHNNY catches him looking.

JOHNNY

No, Major. No. Not in a million years. Not if
the future of the race depended on it.

INT. DECON CHAMBER - A MOMENT LATER

The four of them enter a DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER - airtight seals
all around. It fills with WHITE MIST, which is then weirdly illuminated by
SHARP BURSTS OF LIGHT - and now our foursome is ready to enter . . .

INT. NANOLAB - DAY

It's housed in a little SPUR that juts out from the outermost "wheel" of the
orbital station. On one side - the side facing earth - there's a gigantic
floor-to-ceiling PLEXIGLAS WINDOW that affords an awe-inspiring view.

Inside: ten tons of sophisticated equipment. You get the definite sense
that this is where most of REED's money has been going. The centerpiece
is a VAT the size of a small room, filled with BUBBLING LIQUID MATTER.

The VAT is ringed by a series of VERTICAL TUBES containing liquid of
various COLORS. Each TUBE is linked to a COMPUTER WORKSTATION.

The master of this realm is a solemn, slightly dessicated-looking fellow
with deep, soulful eyes and a vague middle-European accent . . .

REED

Sue, Johnny . . . this is Victor Vandam.

SUE has already extended a hand before she realizes that VICTOR is
MISSING AN ARM - the right SLEEVE of his lab coat is pinned to the
shoulder. He takes her right hand in his left instead - and HOLDS IT.

SUE

Dr. Vandam. I saw you at IBM Zurich once -

VICTOR

I'm sure I would've remembered.

SUE

No, you were speaking at a seminar. I was
back in Row 92.

VICTOR

I would've remembered.

(kissing her hand)

Please call me Victor.

BEN and JOHNNY are agog – you don't get to see this kind of oily old-school macking every day. The wild part is, SUE seems to buy it!

SUE

Reed tells me you've made incredible advances in nanotechnology.

VICTOR

Reed has a weakness for long words. I think of myself as a simple country alchemist.

JOHNNY

Alchemy. Like turning lead into gold?

VICTOR

The transmutation of matter, yes. Medieval alchemists sought to achieve it by means of a magical spell. Here . . . we've achieved it by means of Reed's generous funding.

REED

See, Johnny, once we arrive on Mars, we can convert the raw materials we find into the raw materials we need. The soil could be enriched for agriculture – the atmosphere adjusted –

JOHNNY

So how do you do it? How do you change one element into another?

VICTOR points to a large monitor – brings up progressive magnifications of a weird, knobby-looking GEARSHAFT MECHANISM.

VICTOR

This, Johnny, is the smallest machine in existence. It consists of 960 atoms. It's programmable – self-replicating – capable of thousands of actions per second.

Now he leads them on a quick walk around the big vat, pointing out the VERTICAL TUBES containing colored liquid.

VICTOR

Each tube contains millions of tiny machines – all programmed to perform specific tasks. They penetrate matter, multiply, spread – and make changes. On the molecular level.

VICTOR sits a KEYBOARD TERMINAL and begins to type one-handed. A VERTICAL TUBE full of ORANGE GOO begins emptying into the vat.

VICTOR

We've just released fifty thousand nanoagents into the vat . . . they are now hard at work reorganizing the matter they find there into the configuration I've specified . . . building nerves, muscles, and skin . . .

ON THE MONITOR: a tracking program shows thousands of tiny SPECKS organizing themselves into the wireframe image of an ARM.

A moment later, to the amazement of all, a HUMAN ARM congeals . . . rises up out of the goo in the vat and WAVES at JOHNNY!

VICTOR

Voilà.

SUE is too stunned to speak. She glances over at REED. *He* seems even more wiggled out than she does. VICTOR punches in a few commands on his keyboard, then takes an AIR PISTOL from a drawer . . .

VICTOR

Johnny? If you would.

JOHNNY

What - shoot the hand??

VICTOR nods yes. JOHNNY lifts the pistol - takes aim -

- and in the time it takes him to squeeze the trigger, the arm in the vat TRANSFORMS . . . changing from flesh into CHROME STEEL. DINGGG! The CHROME HAND closes into a fist and CATCHES THE PELLET!

VICTOR taps on his keyboard. The arm DISSOLVES back into the vat. And the TUBE refills with orange goo!

VICTOR

Flesh into steel, in the wink of an eye.

JOHNNY

And you guys have money problems? You can make gold - platinum - whatever you want.

VICTOR

True, Johnny. We can make all the gold we need . . . at a cost of \$18,500 an ounce.

SUE

What about biological applications? The implications are staggering!

The \$64,000 question. A tense look passes between REED and VICTOR.

REED

(the boilerplate speech)

Of course, human genetic manipulation is now illegal in every country on earth.

VICTOR

Of course, we're not on earth.

REED

But we do abide by the law.

VICTOR

Of course, if I did have experimental animals to work with . . . but Reed won't even give me a dog. Every boy should have a dog.

JOHNNY

Why don't you grow your own?

VICTOR

Yes, well, I tried that once . . .

REED

(glowering at VICTOR)

Sue - Johnny - excuse us a moment.

REED pulls VICTOR into a side room for a quick conference. SUE continues to walk around the nano-vat in wonderment.

SUE

What-a brilliant man. Yet there's something almost . . . tragic about him.

BEN

He's Latverian. Lost his whole family in the civil war over there.

SUE

Is that what happened to his arm?

BEN

Never asked.

JOHNNY glances through a glass panel into the side room. We can't hear anything, but REED is obviously tearing VICTOR a new orifice.

JOHNNY

Whoa! Flame on.

INT. SIDE ROOM - THAT MOMENT

REED

We had an agreement, Victor. Tell me. Are you reconfiguring human DNA?

VICTOR

Oh, Reed, please. It's just a hand.

REED

Then the answer is yes?

VICTOR rolls his eyes, makes an irritated face.

REED

Do you know what happens if this gets out? A PR nightmare . . . Congress investigates . . . not to mention the deal with Pace. If Sue Storm reports back that we're -

VICTOR

-- that we're right on the verge of immortality, Reed? A new body, free from disease, decay . . . what would your friend Mr. Pace be willing to pay for that?

VICTOR's missionary zeal sends a chill down REED's spine.

REED

How far have you gone, Victor?

VICTOR

Far enough to know there are no limits. I'm not just close. I'm there.

REED

I want all your lab reports on disk, in my cabin, ASAP. I'm pulling the plug, Victor.

VICTOR

Reed, you're my only ally. My only friend. You can't abandon me.

(incredulous)

You intellectual coward. Crawling on your belly to Pace and his little blond lackeys. You don't deserve me, Reed, you really don't.

VICTOR starts to storm off. REED reaches out to grab him - and BLANCHES. He's caught hold of VICTOR's empty sleeve, the one that's pinned to his lab coat. But *it isn't empty*.

There's something wiggling around inside.

VICTOR

Do you want to see it, Reed?

VICTOR pulls the blinds at the window to the lab. He drops his lab coat. Unbuttons his shirt and PULLS IT BACK to expose what should be a stump where his right arm was amputated.

Instead there's a MINIATURE ARM – with a tiny, perfectly-formed hand!

VICTOR

Do you want to see it grow?

VICTOR GRIMACES in concentration. The vestigial arm GROWS by an inch or two as REED watches in awe.

VICTOR

Nanoagents, Reed. They're fixing me. – I've always been nearsighted. Didn't you notice?

REED

Notice what?

VICTOR

I'm not wearing my glasses!

The triumphant grin he's wearing makes him look thoroughly deranged. REED decides it's best to humor him.

REED

I apologize, Victor. I was angry. It's . . . miraculous.

VICTOR

Common clay – that's what we are, Reed, and now we can remold ourselves just that easily. We can be gods. We really can.

VICTOR clasps REED's hand, pulls his coat back on and returns to the lab. REED stays behind a moment, profoundly scared.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. REED'S CABIN – NIGHT

REED sliding disks into a handheld DATA UNIT as he pores over a stack of VICTOR's notebooks. On a VIEWSCREEN we see a series of images: DNA diagrams, a wireframe schematic of VICTOR'S BODY, an animated cross-section of a HUMAN EYEBALL as it undergoes reconstruction. VICTOR'S RECORDED VOICE plays through the data unit . . .

VICTOR [v.o., filter]

Day six. The extreme myopia I'd experienced yesterday is gone. I now have 20-20 vision in my left eye and the right continues to improve. My concentration is better. No trace of the usual mood swings. I'm a changed man!

As a troubled REED wonders what to do next, a BUZZER SOUNDS: someone at the door. It's SUE – with a bottle of champagne in hand.

SUE

Reed, I wanted you to know – I'm going to endorse the deal in the strongest possible terms. The biotech applications alone . . . you and Victor are about to change the world.

REED doesn't seem to feel a bit like celebrating.

SUE

I brought champagne . . . it's pretty foul stuff . . . Raymond bought it, and you know how cheap he is. But I thought we could –

REED

Victor's used himself as a guinea pig. His body is crawling with nanoagents.

(pointing at the lab reports)

I think they're changing his nervous system – affecting his mental state. And he's growing a new arm.

SUE

Reed – I know you're concerned, but if this technology is controllable, it could be more important than the cancer cure.

REED

If it's controllable. One little kink in the programming, one byte out of place, and it could turn into an unstoppable plague.

As she speaks, our attention drifts DOWNWARD to the aluminum suitcase containing VICTOR'S disks and notebooks. There's a tiny ELECTRONIC DEVICE affixed to the underside of the lid . . .

INT. VICTOR'S CABIN - NIGHT

VICTOR sprawled on his bunk, EAVESDROPPING on the conversation.

REED [o.s.; filter]
I'm not sure I want Raymond to have this
technology. I'm not sure I want to have it.

VICTOR makes a face, lets out a little SNORT of outrage.

VICTOR
That we can certainly arrange.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. POGO PLANE - DAY

Pre-flight. BEN at the console, talking into the radio mike, chewing on an unlit Montecristo. JOHNNY's beside him, riding shotgun.

BEN
Pre-launch routine completed.

JOHNNY
You ever light that thing?

BEN
Can't. Oxygen-rich environment. - It's a
Montecristo. Y'want one?

JOHNNY
Sure.

BEN obliges. Now *both* of them are chewing on unlit cigars.

INT. SUE'S CABIN - DAY

SUE is packing to go when VICTOR'S FACE appears on the comm screen.

VICTOR
Miss Storm, I wanted to say goodbye. There's
one last thing I'd hoped to show you.

SUE
We're supposed to be taking off right now.

VICTOR
I know. I apologize. But I think you'll agree it
was worth the extra minute.

INT. NANOLAB - A MOMENT LATER

SUE arrives, finds VICTOR holding a small perfume bottle of pink fluid.

VICTOR

Thank you for coming. I'd hope to talk to you more. I've been concerned about Reed.

SUE

In what way?

VICTOR

I no longer trust him to understand the importance of my research. I no longer trust him and I no longer need him.

He stares at her so long she feels she's about to wilt.

SUE

There was something you wanted me to see?

VICTOR

Not see, exactly. It's a fragrance. I made it especially for you.

He gives her the bottle. She unscrews the cap and takes a good whiff.

SUE

Smells like orchids.

VICTOR

Yes, it does. Do you like orchids?

(apologetically)

I do want to say I find you personally charming. I've never hurt a woman in any way.

SUE

Victor, I . . .

SUE suddenly realizes that she's feeling quite FAINT.

VICTOR

I think I'm possessed of a certain gallantry. As is Reed. You see, I'm rather counting on Reed's gallantry - in fact it's crucial.

SUE

I . . . don't . . . understand.

VICTOR

That's for the best.

SUE slumps to the floor. VICTOR picks up the two glasses, rinses them in the lab sink, sets them fastidiously on a rack to dry.

Then he grabs two beakers of COLORED NANO-GOO. The GREEN beaker he pours onto a bank of MACHINERY. And the RED beaker . . .

. . . he FLINGS at the plexiglas WINDOW PANEL which overlooks the dark side of the earth, and the sun beyond it. The BEAKER SHATTERS and the RED GOO runs in rivulets down the windowpane.

VICTOR hefts two ALUMINUM SUITCASES and proceeds quietly to the decontamination chamber before exiting.

INT. POGO PLANE - THAT MOMENT

REED, BEN, and JOHNNY strapped in, waiting impatiently for SUE. A distant ALARM sounds . . .

RADIO VOICE [filter]

Mr. Richards, we've got a fire in the nanolab.

REED

Victor. Is he in there?

(no reply)

Tower - can you give us a visual?

A SMALL MONITOR over the console comes to life, giving us the view from a small SURVEILLANCE CAMERA sweeping across the lab. SMOKE pours from the bank of MACHINERY that VICTOR doused with nanogoo. A couple of seconds pass before they spot the limp form on the floor . . .

REED

Sue.

JOHNNY

Are you saying my sister's in there?

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

BLARING ALARMS. The FEET of various CREW MEMBERS as they race past to the site of the disturbance. And ANOTHER pair of feet, walking calmly in the opposite direction . . . VICTOR's.

INT. CORRIDOR - OUTSIDE NANOLAB - THAT MOMENT

An IMPENETRABLE PLEXIGLAS SHIELD has descended into place just outside the entrance to the NANOLAB. Three or four CREW MEMBERS are already waiting outside when REED, BEN and JOHNNY arrive.

CREW MEMBER

Emergency shields are up, sir -

REED

(to JOHNNY)

It's an automatic system. Airtight. Seals off the rest of the station in case of fire . . .

Beyond the shield you can't see much of anything but SMOKE.

JOHNNY

Well, how do we get in??

REED

There's an override code . . . LISTEN UP. I want this corridor SEALED OFF at the far end.

BEN

You heard the man. Clear the corridor!

BEN grabs a CHEMICAL FOAM EXTINGUISHER from one of the CREW MEMBERS and sends the rest of the crew packing.

JOHNNY

No way I'm clearing out, man.

BEN doesn't argue. ANOTHER PANEL descends at the far end of the corridor, leaving BEN, JOHNNY and REED sealed inside.

REED'S trembling finger hovers over a DIGITAL KEYPAD beside the panel.

JOHNNY

What's the matter? Use the code.

REED

I'm trying to remember! I -

Flustered, REED punches in a code. A BUZZER SOUNDS. Wrong guess. BEN throws an arm around REED's shoulder to calm him.

BEN

No sweat, baby. Cool and calm. Try again.

Success. The panel rises - and SMOKE pours out from underneath.

INT. DOCKING BAY - NIGHT

Deserted. VICTOR arrives with his two aluminum suitcases. He crosses to the Pogo Plane and BOARDS IT.

INT BIOLAB - A MOMENT LATER

BEN sprays the bank of machinery with CHEMICAL FOAM. The fire's out in a couple of seconds. REED and JOHNNY kneel at SUE'S side . . .

REED

She's all right. She'll be fine.

She starts to come around, COUGHING violently.

BEN

Hey, Reed. Take a look at this.

BEN points to the bank of MACHINERY. Its surface is crisscrossed with DEEP, SMOOTH-EDGED DECLIVITIES – a little network of artificial canyons, carved out by nanogoo!

BEN

What the hell could've done this?

REED

. . . Victor.

INT. POGO PLANE – A MOMENT LATER

VICTOR strapped into the pilot's seat. A flashing message on the console reads "LAUNCH SEQUENCE PAUSED." He throws a switch – and now the message reads "LAUNCH SEQUENCE RESUMED."

HYDRAULIC DOORS slide shut, closing off his view of the docking bay as the airlock DEPRESSURIZES. VICTOR settles back and watches the seconds tick away: 45 . . . 44 . . . 43 . . .

INT. NANOLAB – THAT MOMENT

REED

He's lost it. He's trying to sabotage his own facility.

BEN

Reed? Find that creep and lock him up. Now.

JOHNNY helps SUE into a chair. A SHAFT OF LIGHT hits her square in the face – the SUN is just rising over the black disc of the earth.

Shielding his eyes, JOHNNY looks up at the plexiglas WINDOW . . .

JOHNNY

What's up with that?

For the first time they notice the THICK RED SEAMS on the surface of the window – spreading outward from the spot where VICTOR'S BEAKER shattered. The nanogoo is eating through the window like acid!

REED and BEN have just enough time to exchange a look of horror, realizing they've been lured into a gargantuan BOOBY TRAP. Then . . .

BOOM! The window EXPLODES OUTWARD into space.

With hurricane force the NANOLAB DEPRESSURIZES. Everything that's not NAILED DOWN goes rocketing outward into the void. The stuff that IS nailed down starts to PRY ITSELF LOOSE.

JOHNNY is the first to go. Mouth open in a silent SCREAM, he's sucked out like a leaf in the wind - FLUNG into the vacuum of space.

BEN is clinging to a bolted-down LAB TABLE. An enormous piece of MACHINERY comes flying across the floor and slams into the table, SMASHING IT - and carrying both table and BEN along with it as it hurtles outward into blackness.

REED has managed to get one arm around SUE'S WAIST, and another around a structural UPRIGHT. He holds on as tightly as he can, but the outward rush of air pulls the two of them almost HORIZONTAL. His grip weakens - gives - and the two of them go flying off with the others . . .

The sudden pressure shift causes the massive NANO-VAT to explode. MULTI-COLORED GOO erupts outward like airborne lava.

The whole horrific disaster has taken ten seconds maximum . . .

EXT. ORBITAL STATION - NIGHT

The POGO PLANE is detaching itself from the docking bay. Small retro-rockets push it back from the station. Then the nose of the plane elevates as the computerized navigational system pilots it on its homeward course.

INT. POGO PLANE - A MOMENT LATER

VICTOR sitting back, enjoying the view. As the plane rounds the edge of the orbital station, he sees a scattering of SPACE DEBRIS drifting away from the hole in the hull - four small human BODIES among it . . .

VICTOR

Requiescat in pace, Reed . . .

When he looks up, he realizes - to his extreme dismay - that a big chunk of MACHINERY from the lab happens to be drifting his way. In fact it's on a direct COLLISION COURSE with the Pogo Plane. A computerized VOICE from the console fills him in:

VOICE

Obstacle detected. Collision is imminent.

Reverting to manual control for evasive action.

A big red light flashes MANUAL. VICTOR stares down at the control console in a panic. A guy like BEN comes in handy at times like this,

because VICTOR *has no idea how to fly the plane.*

VOICE

Obstacle detected. Collision is imminent.

Obstacle detected. Collision is -

WHAM. The cockpit ROCKS. The LIGHTS DIE. SPARKS GO FLYING.

EXT. ORBITAL STATION - THAT MOMENT

POGO PLANE and STRAY MACHINERY bounce soundlessly off one another. Obviously the plane has gotten the worst of it.

As the disabled plane WOBBLES OFF toward earth, we TILT DOWN to the four rag dolls floating lifelessly below - glassy eyes open, mouths frozen permanently in expressions of horror. No one could survive this long in total vacuum. There's just no way around it - our four heroes are DEAD.

Floating nearby are ENORMOUS GLOBULES of Victor's NANOTECH GOO. Not only the undifferentiated matter from the central vat, but also the COLOR-CODED glop from the surrounding tubes . . . the glop with the extra-special ingredient . . . MILLIONS of microscopic NANOAGENTS.

This luminous glop seems to know *exactly what to do*. When REED'S BODY drifts by, a GREENISH GLOBULE shoots out a pseudopod and LATCHES ON TO HIS FACE. It seeks out the nostrils, the ears, the mouth - entering his body by way of any available orifice.

An ORANGE GLOB finds BEN, and works its way in through the pores of his skin! The same thing happens to SUE and JOHNNY.

They float for a while in perfect silence. Then a HATCH OPENS in the hull of the station, and a RESCUE TEAM in pressurized suits equipped with JETPACKS comes out to retrieve the four corpses . . .

INT. POGO PLANE - THAT MOMENT

VICTOR gasping for breath in the cockpit as the disabled Pogo Plane hurtles downward to the earth. The interior temperature is pushing 200° F. RED WARNING LIGHTS are flashing all over the console - along with messages reading "HEAT SHIELD DISABLED!" "HULL DAMAGE!" "RETRO-ROCKET MALFUNCTION!"

VICTOR manages one last SHRIEK as the panel BURSTS INTO FLAME.

EXT. POGO PLANE - A MOMENT LATER

The POGO PLANE reentering earth's outer atmosphere. By now it's no more than a BLAZING BALL OF MOLTEN SLAG.

INT. ORBITAL STATION - A MOMENT LATER

The RESCUE TEAM brings the last of the four corpses aboard. The outer hatch closes. The bay repressurizes. The TEAM MEMBERS remove their helmets and climb out of their bulky spacesuits.

The inner door hisses open. The rest of the CREW is standing by inside. No words are exchanged - the solemn expressions of the RESCUE TEAM do all the talking. Until . . .

VOICE FROM BEHIND

Sir. Sir. Could you come here, please?

The TEAM LEADER turns. ONE MEMBER of the rescue team has lingered behind. He's kneeling - holding REED'S WRIST in one hand.

RESCUE TEAM MEMBER

See if I'm wrong, sir. Just see if I'm wrong. -
They've got a pulse. They're breathing.

Impossible. Can't be. But the TEAM LEADER kneels down anyway . . .

TEAM LEADER

Good Lord. Get the med crew. They're alive.

EXT. NORTH ATLANTIC - NIGHT

A vast expanse of empty sea - empty, that is, until the prow of the Russian freighter *Yuri Gagarin* comes slicing into frame.

EXT. SHIP'S BRIDGE - NIGHT

The ship's CAPTAIN lounging with coffee, a cigarette, and a Russian translation of a Tom Clancy novel. All at once the bridge is BATHED IN LIGHT - as if a new, RED SUN has suddenly appeared in the sky.

He looks out over the waters and is almost BLINDED by the sight of an enormous FIREBALL hurtling down from the heavens!

CAPTAIN

(in SUBTITLED Russian)

ALL HANDS! MAN STATIONS! IT'S A --

Before he can finish a SHOCK WAVE sets the entire ship rocking.

EXT. NORTH ATLANTIC - ON THE SHIP - NIGHT

Torrential RAIN pours down on the ship. In the distance, rising from the surface of the water, is a STEAM FUNNEL the size of a mushroom cloud!

FADE THROUGH TO:

INT. BIOLAB (BEN'S POV) - DAY

BLACK SCREEN. Then the blurry image of JOHNNY STORM comes slowly into focus. He's sitting at the foot of a HOSPITAL BED, looking pained and apprehensive. BEN lets out a deep offscreen GROAN . . .

JOHNNY

We're back on Earth, Major. We made it.

BEN [o.s.]

Reed . . . Sue . . . ?

JOHNNY

They're fine. Everyone else . . . is fine.

JOHNNY gets up and circles around the bed. His sickly expression tells us that the very act of looking at BEN is a difficult chore.

JOHNNY

No point beating around the bush . . . the docs did everything they could, but . . .

BEN [o.s.]

What . . . what's wrong with me . . . ?

JOHNNY

There's one guy in Switzerland. A plastic surgeon. He's flying in tomorrow.

BEN [o.s.]

Give me a mirror.

JOHNNY

It could mean years of operations. The thing is, you have to be brave, okay? Be brave . . .

BEN [o.s.]

GIVE ME THE MIRROR!!

BEN SNATCHES the mirror out of JOHNNY's hand. As he looks into it, WE GET our first glimpse of his face . . .

. . . *which is perfectly normal*. It's plain old BEN, with a bad case of bed hair. JOHNNY affects a look of horror -

JOHNNY

AIN'T IT GRUESOME?!?!?

He cackles in glee as BEN pitches the hand mirror directly at his skull.

INT. BIOLAB - ADJACENT ROOM - THAT MOMENT - DAY

A suite of glassed-in rooms: REED, SUE, PACE and a team of DOCTORS. They hear the sound of FURNITURE CRASHING next door. JOHNNY pops in and slams the door shut as GLASS SHATTERS on the other side.

JOHNNY

Ben's up. He just pulled out his I.V.

PACE

Help me, Reed. If the word "sabotage" gets out, we're looking at a billion-dollar stock hit.

REED

I'll let you out of the deal if you want, Ray. But we're not leaving this facility until I finish my tests.

PACE

I don't want out of the deal. All I want is . . . damage control. So what do we blame it on - space debris? Cosmic rays?

JOHNNY

Reed, I'm getting itchy in here. We passed all the standard quarantine procedures -

REED

It's not a standard situation, Johnny. The log shows over six minutes elapsed between the explosion and the rescue. Six minutes in vacuum, and we are all dead.

JOHNNY

Fine, Reed, we're all dead. But if you don't mind, I have a date. So . . .

Before REED knows it, JOHNNY is out the airlock and WAVING at him from the other side of the glass. REED slams a fist on the table.

SUE

Reed, it's all right. We're alive. We're healthy. What are you expecting to find??

He stares at her. He doesn't have an answer. As he returns to his microscope, we see a rack of TEST TUBES - BLOOD SAMPLES bearing the names of REED, SUE, JOHNNY, and BEN.

INT. BIOLAB - NIGHT

Late. REED's still at the microscope. He hears a soft POP behind him.

He ignores it. Then, a moment later . . . a second POP. He swivels away from the microscope. His gaze falls on the rack of TEST TUBES.

Two of them are empty - and their stoppers are missing. As REED looks on, a THIRD TUBE pops its cork. The blood sample inside it comes SLITHERING OUT of its own free will - ESCAPING.

He glances down. His eyes bug out. Three blood samples, like fat red caterpillars, are making a beeline toward the edge of the lab table.

REED

Sue?! - SUE!!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SKI RESORT - DAY

We're ten thousand feet up - overlooking the nastiest, most difficult SKI SLOPE in the area. At the very summit, trudging through the snow in their expensive ski gear, are JOHNNY and girlfriend-of-the-week FRANKIE - the redhead from the convertible.

FRANKIE

Race you to the bottom. Loser pays for room service.

JOHNNY

That's you, loser. Champagne and caviar.

Grinning, she pulls him over for a kiss. But when her hand touches his face, she yanks it back - as if she's just touched a hot stove.

FRANKIE

Johnny, you're hot.

JOHNNY

Tell me something I don't know.

FRANKIE

No, hot. Feverish. You feel like you're burning up . . . look at your breath.

It's cold out, and everyone has frosty breath. But JOHNNY is exhaling a thick cloud of STEAM every time he opens his mouth.

JOHNNY

I feel fine.

They don their goggles, take their places at the top of the run.

FRANKIE

I think I smell something burning . . .

JOHNNY

Give it a rest, will you? - GO!

And they're off. FRANKIE takes the early lead. She doesn't notice the first wisps of BLACK SMOKE trailing from JOHNNY's collar and cuffs . . .

EXT. SLOPES - DAY

FRANKIE knows every inch of this trail. She slices in and out of the trees expertly. But JOHNNY is a natural competitor. He keeps FRANKIE in sight, and gradually he begins to close the gap.

PINPOINT JETS OF FLAME are shooting through the back of his clothes.

His whole body begins to SHAKE and SHUDDER. He realizes he's shooting downhill at a totally unnatural clip - and he *can't stop*.

Just as he draws even with FRANKIE, the pinpoint flames reach critical mass. The back of his ski suit BLASTS AWAY - and a massive eruption of FLAME thrusts JOHNNY down the slope like a rocket sled!!

FRANKIE is knocked over by the shockwave. By the time she gets to her feet, there's nothing she can do but gape in horror. JOHNNY is receding from view like a fiery missile, and he shows no sign of slowing down.

FRANKIE

JOHNNY!!

EXT. SKI JUMP - A MOMENT LATER - DAY

A SKIER reaches the lip of the jump and soars off into the blue. A second SKIER reaches the lip of the jump and soars off into the blue.

A HUMAN FIREBALL reaches the lip of the jump, soars off into the blue . . . and KEEPS ON GOING!!

CLOSEUP - JOHNNY

His GOGGLES melt away as his face is engulfed in flame. By now he's going so fast his features are DISTENDED - he looks like an astronaut straining against G-forces during blastoff.

He glances down and SCREAMS. He's a couple of hundred feet off the ground, and he's *still rising* - sailing toward the tips of the tallest pines

WIPE TO:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

BEN's fresh out of the shower, a towel wrapped around his waist, shaving. He sees a spot of RED in the mirror - he's nicked himself on the jaw. He glances down, rinsing off his razor under the spigot.

When he looks back up, the cut is GONE. In its place is an irregular patch of HARD ARMOR PLATE the size of a small ashtray. It's as if a little orange BRICK has sprouted, tumor-like, from his neck.

He's horrified. Whatever it is, it wasn't there a moment ago. He picks at it, but it doesn't want to come off.

Now he gets frantic - digging his fingernails in around the orange growth. Then he realizes that wherever he scratches, a NEW GROWTH forms . . .

BEN

Jesus!

INT. GRIMM'S YANCY ST. TAVERN - NIGHT

Mustachioed ERNIE GRIMM is polishing glasses behind the bar. It takes him a moment to recognize BEN - who enters in a heavy TRENCH COAT with a turned-up collar.

ERNIE

Little brother! What's with the flasher outfit?

BEN

Is Charlene here?

ERNIE

You bet. In your regular booth.

BEN

Do me a favor, Ernie. Tell her I can't see her tonight. I gotta get to a doc.

ERNIE

Why don't you tell her? What's wrong?

BEN opens his collar. ERNIE goes wide-eyed.

ERNIE

Ben - what the hell is that?

BEN

I cut myself shaving -

ERNIE

Ben, don't joke about a thing like this.

BEN

I'm not joking! I -

VOICE FROM BEHIND

Hi, handsome.

BEN instantly pulls his collar tight about his neck. The VOICE belongs to CHARLENE - blonde, buxom, a little cheap, the kind BEN likes.

CHARLENE

Late again. Ernie, pull this big lug a beer.

She throws her arms around his neck. He recoils slightly -

CHARLENE

Ben, what is that?

She pulls her hand away - stares at it as if she might be infected.

BEN

I don't know.

CHARLENE

Well, how long have you had it? Is it -

BEN

Charlene, I don't know. I was on my way in to see the doctor -

CHARLENE

Oh my God. I've had this rash on my - ever since we - oh my God.

Staring at him, she backs out of the bar without even saying goodbye.

BEN hears a round of APPLAUSE behind him. It comes from a group of GREASY YOUNG ASSHOLES at the nearby pool table, whom aficionados will recognize as the YANCY STREET GANG.

BEN

(to ERNIE; under his breath)

Why do you let that gang of trashbags drink in here?

ERNIE

They're paying customers, Ben. Let it go.

He slides BEN a drink as the YANCY STREETERS gather at the bar.

PUNK I

Major! That's some hickey. What, you been neckin' with Godzilla?

PUNK II

Worse. Charlene! I mean, Godzilla's ugly, but he won't give you a dose.

ERNIE

Why don't you guys give it a rest? Have a round on me.

PUNK III

I don't think that's a hickey at all. I saw something like that last week on *E.R.*

(pause)

It's a hemorrhoid.

BEN tries to maintain his composure as the Yancy Streeters CRACK UP.

PUNK II

Dumbass . . . you don't get hemorrhoids on your face.

PUNK III

Face? . . . Is that his face?

WILD HILARITY. BEN CRUSHES his highball glass in his fist. When he looks down at his hand, it's sprouting crusty orange GROWTHS.

BEN

Ernie, you're my brother, I love you, I hope you'll accept my sincere apologies . . .

(beat)

. . . but it's clobberin' time.

BEN gets up from his barstool. ERNIE covers his face.

EXT. GRIMM'S TAVERN - NIGHT

WE HOLD for two beats on the picturesque exterior of the bar . . . after which PUNK I comes hurtling through the plate-glass window, followed in short order by PUNK II. A moment later BEN steps through, with two more PUNKS clinging to his back like barnacles.

BEN flicks them off like fleas. Another PUNK tries to rush BEN from the front - but it's like running full-force into a cinderblock wall. The PUNK just BOUNCES OFF.

BEN grabs him by collar and crotch and HEAVES HIM into the air. The PUNK goes SAILING - all the way ACROSS THE STREET - slamming into a LAMPPOST at the far end of the block!!

Shocked by his own strength, BEN LAUGHS. When he sees the horrified

look on the faces of the Yancy Streeters, he laughs EVEN HARDER.

EXT. STREET - ANOTHER ANGLE - NIGHT

The three remaining PUNKS have scrambled off to a CAR parked up the street. One slides in behind the wheel. Another pulls a TIRE IRON out of the trunk. The third reaches into the GLOVE COMPARTMENT -

- for a 9MM AUTOMATIC! The DRIVER revs the engine and pulls out of the space while the other two rush back toward BEN.

The guy with the tire iron gets there first and takes a swing. BEN dodges it - almost. The tire iron comes down on his FOOT . . .

. . . and BEN'S SHOE EXPLODES. His foot BURSTS OUT, enormously swollen with ARMOR PLATE! BEN grabs the tire-iron PUNK by one ankle, picks him up, and SWINGS HIM into the PUNK with the 9MM.

The guy with the GUN manages to squeeze off TWO SHOTS - point blank range - at BEN'S CHEST.

BEN looks down. There are TWO BULLETHOLES in his chest - but NO BLOOD. TWO ENORMOUS CHUNKS OF ORANGE ARMOR PLATE sprout on his chest . . .

. . . and the TWO BULLETS pop out and land on the sidewalk!!

BEN grabs the gun and CRUSHES IT in his fist - then starts after the fear-crazed PUNKS.

INT. CAR - MOVING - THAT MOMENT

The last PUNK at the wheel. His HEADLIGHTS catch BEN up ahead. He FLOORS THE PEDAL - planning to RUN BEN DOWN where he stands.

EXT. STREET - ON BEN

When he sees the car coming he flings the other two PUNKS aside - and STANDS HIS GROUND as the car HITS HIM. BEN staggers backward - stumbles into a storefront window. Broken glass cascades around him.

But he's not hurt. In fact the CAR has taken the worst of the collision. The front grille is bent out of shape and the PUNK at the wheel can't get the car to restart!

BEN SLAMS BOTH FISTS down on the hood of the car, SMASHING IT. Then he reaches under the car . . . and FLIPS IT OVER ON ITS ROOF!! The DRIVER crawls out through the open window and runs off down the street, SCREAMING.

BEN

Candyass.

EXT. STOREFRONT - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

It's some sort of GALLERY - the pottery and masks and small figurines that were displayed in the window are now on the floor in pieces. BEN sits wearily in the shattered window, picking glass out of his clothes. His shirt is in tatters. HALF HIS TORSO is now covered with armor plate.

He picks up a shard of GLASS from the sidewalk - big enough to show him his own reflection in the light from the nearest streetlamp. Only isolated patches of flesh remain visible. The new growths give his head an oversized, misshapen look.

BEN

Oh, God.

BEN shuts his eyes, hoping the gruesome reflection will go away, or change. Of course it doesn't. With a howl of misery, he flings the glass shard to the pavement, where it SHATTERS into a hundred fragments.

Someone GASPS in the store behind him. He turns. A WOMAN'S VOICE emerges from the shadows.

VOICE [o.s.]

I won't - fight you. Take whatever you want.

(beat)

I have some money. Almost forty dollars -

He looks around him at the shattered window, the broken figurines, and realizes she's mistaken him for a vandal.

BEN

Lady, no, you got it all wrong . . . I can't help the way I look, okay? You don't have to be afraid of me.

A long pause - as if she's sizing him up by the sound of his voice.

VOICE [o.s.]

. . . I'm not afraid.

BEN

Then why don't you turn on the lights?

A DELICATE HAND reaches from the shadows - pats the wall a few times - finally finds the light switch, and flicks it on.

ALICIA

I don't use them much. I don't need them.

(beat)
I'm Alicia Masters.

BEN immediately realizes that – in addition to being small, and frail, and ethereally beautiful – the woman before him is as blind as a stone.

BEN
Alicia Masters. You did the stuff in the window here?

ALICIA
Yes. I have a studio in the back –

BEN
Well, I'd like to – buy – a few of your pieces.

ALICIA
Which are the ones you like?

BEN looks down at the wreckage. Not a single piece remains intact.

BEN
All the ones in the window.

ALICIA
All of them?

BEN
Look, I should explain – I broke them. That's not to say I don't like 'em. I do like 'em. Or I did, until I broke 'em . . .

(pause)
My name is Ben. Ben Grimm. I'm really sorry, Miss Masters.

She smiles and steps forward confidently to shake his hand. But she can't see the rubble and debris strewn in her path, and she STUMBLES. BEN reaches out to steady her –

BEN
Sorry. I've messed up your place pretty good.
Her hand brushes against his – feels armor plate instead of flesh.

ALICIA
Ben, what am I feeling?

BEN
It's . . . my hand.

ALICIA

Are you hurt?

She's reaching out to touch his FACE. He backs away - leaving her to grope at thin air.

BEN

Don't touch me. There's something happening to me. I don't know what it is. I just . . . don't want to be touched.

ALICIA

It's the only way I have of seeing you.

BEN

Trust me. You wouldn't like the view.

But she stands her ground - extends her hands toward him, and waits for him to move closer. Heaving a sigh, BEN gives in.

He squirms as ALICIA runs her fingers over his disfigured face.

ALICIA

You feel like a cat's tongue.

She smiles. For the first time in a long while, he does too.

ALICIA

You're in pain, Ben. Words lie, but voices don't. What happened to you?

BEN

Long story. Look . . . I'll be back tomorrow. To pay for the sculptures. And the cost of fixing up your shop.

ALICIA

This must be my lucky night.

(smiling)

I make a big sale - and I get to renovate. I'm glad I met you, Ben Grimm.

She reaches out to shake his hand goodbye. BEN extends his own hand, but pulls it back at the last moment. He turns up his collar and wanders off down the street.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BIOLAB - NIGHT

A HYPODERMIC NEEDLE draws a blood sample from REED's arm. He's

at a cluttered lab table, with SUE, PACE, and the usual contingent of LAB TECHS looking on. PACE and the TECHS wear BIOHAZARD SUITS.

REED

Okay. Now let's mix it up with Sue's sample.

TECH I hands him a GLASS SLIDE with a smear of SUE'S BLOOD on it. REED takes the syringe and carefully squirts a couple of drops of his own blood onto the slide, allowing them to MINGLE with SUE's.

REED

Marriage . . .

As they look on in amazement, the mixed blood sample begins to swirl and move, SEPARATING into TWO DISCRETE BLOBS.

REED

. . . divorce . . .

The tiny red blobs start crawling toward opposite ends of the slide – toward REED on one side, and SUE on the other. REED touches the edge of the slide with his index finger –

– and the blood sample REENTERS HIS BODY through the pores in his fingertip, like water being sucked up by a sponge!

REED

. . . and home to papa.

PACE

Unbelievable! The stuff's got a homing instinct.

REED

The nanoagents must somehow bond with the host organism. The question is, did Victor program them that way, or . . .

PACE

"Or" what?

SUE

. . . or are they learning.

While they're pondering the implications of this question, JOHNNY comes rushing breathlessly into the lab – wearing a PRISONER'S JUMPSUIT.

JOHNNY

Reed! Reed! You're not gonna believe this. I spontaneously combusted!

REED

. . . You did what?

JOHNNY

I'm telling you. I burst into flame. All of a sudden I was flying - like a human jet!

SUE

What's that outfit you're wearing?

JOHNNY

This? Well, I came down in the middle of Main Street, and I didn't realize it, but my clothes had all burned off, see? And . . . Frankie had to bail me out on her Visa card. So we - JESUS H. CHRIST!!

He's just caught sight of BEN, who's covered with electrodes and wired up to monitoring devices. Forty percent of his body is covered in armor plate.

JOHNNY

What happened here?

REED

Ben appears to be developing some kind of armor plate. Any kind of trauma - a nick, an abrasion - and his body reacts like . . . this.

BEN's disfiguring plight is not the sort of thing you'd wish on your worst enemy. JOHNNY is genuinely horrified. He reaches out to touch one of the tumorous rocky growths -

BEN

Don't touch me.

JOHNNY

Not a problem.

SUE

It's Victor's nanotechnology. We've all been infected . . . or maybe invaded.

JOHNNY

Well, we can fix it, right? It's curable . . . ?

LONG SILENCE and NERVOUS LOOKS all around.

REED

In principle. If we just knew how to reprogram the nanoagents . . .

BEN

Of course, we don't know how, and the one guy who does is a big damn pile of roasted atoms.

REED

Ben, if I could trade places with you, I would.

BEN

Not so fast, Reed. Let's wait and see what you look like in the morning.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - OUTSIDE PACE'S BIOLAB - NIGHT

TWO SECURITY GUARDS sitting outside a pressurized STEEL DOOR which bears the warning:

QUARANTINE ZONE

Absolutely No Admittance

Without Proper Authorization

INT. BIOLAB - SIDE ROOM - NIGHT

Several glassed-in side offices have been set up as temporary housing for the quarantine victims. First we see JOHNNY stretched out on a cot, a tangle of wires and electrodes attached to his body - a bundle of barely-suppressed nervous energy.

INT. SIDE ROOM #2 - NIGHT

And here's BEN, lying corpselike on his own cot, staring at the ceiling, wondering what sort of life he can expect to lead if his condition persists -

INT. BIOLAB - NIGHT

- which leaves REED and SUE. They're burning the midnight oil among the electron microscopes, readout monitors, etc.

REED

It doesn't adapt to us, Sue. It's reconfiguring our nervous systems. It's changing us - to suit its own purposes.

SUE

Which are - ?

REED

It lives inside us. Maybe we're like houses. Maybe it's renovating. How do I know!?

(beat)

I hope to God it won't turn us all psychotic,
like Victor . . .

The fatigue and stress are obviously getting to him.

SUE

Reed. Go sleep for a couple of hours. I'll keep
an eye on the readouts.

REED

Maybe I could catch a quick nap.

She walks him to one of the side rooms. He barely makes it - his legs are
like rubber. He flops, face down, on the cot.

SUE

And stop tormenting yourself, okay? I'll
torment you - first thing in the morning.

REED

Thanks, Sue . . . you're . . .

Bang - he's out. SUE turns out the light and exits. She wanders past the
other rooms, checking the monitors, peering in through the blinds at BEN
and JOHNNY. Then she stops in front of a MIRROR . . .

. . . and stares at her own reflection. She's beautiful. Probably always
has been. What's she going to look like a week from now?

INT. SIDE ROOM #3 - NIGHT

REED shifts slightly, so that his hand is dangling limply off the edge of the
bed. It droops toward the floor and droops some more . . .

REED'S FOREARM ELONGATES UNNATURALLY - practically OOZING out
of his sleeve! His hand hits the floor with a thick, liquescent PLOP.

WIPE TO:

INT. BIOLAB - MORNING

A cozy little domestic scene: BEN and JOHNNY having their morning
coffee at a folding table, BEN reading the sports page. SUE carries a
breakfast tray to REED's room . . .

INT. SIDE ROOM #3 - MORNING

The room is empty. REED's rumpled clothes are still on the bed, but
there's no trace of REED himself.

SUE

Reed - ?

REED (o.s.)

OW!!

Something GOOSHES underfoot. She looks down . . .

. . . and realizes she's STEPPED on a puddle of RIPPLING FLESH-COLORED GOO that covers the entire floor of the room. In the middle of the puddle are EYES, a NOSE, and a MOUTH - which look sort of like . . .

REED

Oh. Sue. I was having the strangest dream -

She SCREAMS and chucks her tray into the air - spilling hot coffee all over REED.

REED

OWWWWWWWWW!!

INT. BIOLAB - CONTINUOUS

SUE stumbles out of the room GOGGLE-EYED. BEN and JOHNNY are there in an instant. She points down frantically at the floor, too stunned to speak. One look at REED and the boys are goggle-eyed too.

REED's facial features float toward them, eyeballs looking right and left.

REED

Hard . . . to move. Something may be . . .
wrong with me . . .

BEN

Take it slow, buddy. Just give me your ha -

The puddle doesn't seem to have anything that would qualify as a hand.

BEN

Just give me your - give me - just reach out.

A SHAKY PSEUDOPOD rises out of the goo. BEN grasps it.

BEN

Good. Now try to . . . ooze on over . . .

BEN tries to pull REED forward. But the hand just stretches out like a long gummy strand of pizza cheese.

JOHNNY

(nervous chuckle - to BEN)

Whoa - still wanna trade places?

BEN drops the hand – and turns on JOHNNY, ENRAGED.

BEN

You're making jokes?? You think this is funny?!? You little piece of butt crust.

JOHNNY

Hey! What? I was just –

BEN

That's a man down there. That's my friend!
Why, I oughta –

BEN MAKES A GRAB at JOHNNY. JOHNNY raises an ARM to ward him off – and a JET OF FLAME shoots out, scorching BEN!!

BEN ROARS IN PAIN. Within seconds, NEW ARMOR PLATE is sprouting where his skin was burned.

JOHNNY

That just happened. I didn't mean for that to happen –

BEN charges at him again. And guess what “just happens” again? While they're going at it, SUE lets out a YELL:

SUE

STOP IT! STOP IT! I can't stand any more.

The boys turn. Stare at SUE. All hostilities immediately CEASE.

SUE

Kill each other if you want to, but don't do it in front of me!

But SUE isn't there. All we can see are her CLOTHES, HANGING IN MIDAIR . . . WITH NO ONE INSIDE THEM.

SUE

What is it? What's wrong?

BEN

Go have a look in the mirror.

SUE'S CLOTHES walk past on the way to the mirror.

JOHNNY

I will never do drugs again.

BEN, spent, sits at the table and picks up the paper. He barely even looks up when SUE SHRIEKS off-camera.

BEN

Hey, everybody, the Mets are alone in first place.

SUE'S CLOTHES return. JOHNNY embraces her. As she sobs in his arms, little patches of MOISTURE appear magically on his shoulder.

And, down on the floor, REED'S EYES are darting right and left in the midst of his gooey, amoeboid face . . .

REED

Is everything okay?

WIPE TO:

INT. BIOLAB - DAY

REED'S HEAD sticks out of a FULL-BODY MOLD - a sort of hollow, jointed mannequin designed to help him relearn his proper body shape. His neck is rubbery. His head bobs around like a dashboard ornament.

SUE holds out her hands. REED takes a first Frankensteinian baby step.

SUE [v.o.]

Reed was correct. The nanoagents are slowly rebuilding our nervous systems to give us conscious control of our new abilities.

INT. BIOLAB - DAY

REED is now out of the body mold, retaining his natural shape. SUE has him walking - very slowly, very uncertainly - on a TREADMILL.

SUE

Just concentrate. Try to stay rigid.

Onlookers BEN and JOHNNY exchange simultaneous insults.

BEN

JOHNNY

Guess you hear a lot of that.

Sound familiar, Major?

REED'S LEGS turn to goo beneath him. He hits the floor with a SPLAT.

REED [v.o.]

Sue put forth one hypothesis - intriguing, though unsupported by evidence - that the nanoagents have transformed us according to our existing character traits.

INT. BIOLAB - DAY

JOHNNY working out on a Nautilus machine. BEN is also working out on a Nautilus machine . . . lifting the ENTIRE MACHINE in one hand and doing a dozen effortless reps.

REED [v.o.]

*Ben, driven by a self-destructive rage, cut off
from the world by layers of emotional armor . . .*

BEN sets the machine down and unwraps a Montecristo. Before he can light the cigar, a JET OF FLAME shoots across the room - INCINERATING the cigar and singeing BEN's eyebrows in the bargain.

JOHNNY

Oops.

BEN spits out the butt and goes after JOHNNY.

REED [v.o.]

*Johnny, the rash, reckless hotshot - or in Ben's
less delicate term, a 'flaming asshole' . . .*

INT. BIOLAB - SIDE ROOM #4 - DAY

TRANSLUCENT SUE, fading in and out, reaches into a CLOTHES CLOSET - where her hand happens to brush against her blue THERMAL SUIT from the orbital station. Amazingly, the instant she touches the suit, it begins to FADE FROM VIEW.

REED [v.o.]

*Sue herself, a beautiful - rather, a brilliant
woman, who's spent years making Raymond
Pace look good - unrecognized, invisible . . .*

She drapes the blue "4" suit across her front. It FADES IN AND OUT in perfect synchronization with SUE herself.

INT. BIOLAB - DAY

SUE increases the speed on REED's treadmill. This time he gets up to a full run before his legs give out beneath him.

REED [v.o.]

*. . . and me. That's always been the rap on me.
Overly cautious, indecisive, afraid of failing . . .*

He DOESN'T HIT THE GROUND. He just STOPS a foot and a half off the floor - as if he's landed on a soft cushion of SHEER FORCE. The force bubble is INVISIBLE, except for a slight refractive SHIMMER . . .

REED

Sue? Are you . . . doing this somehow?

SUE

I think so.

REED

How?

SUE

I didn't want you to hit the ground again.

REED

I didn't ask why, Sue. I asked how - !

She turns away, insulted by his brusque manner. A tiny audible POP, and the cushion's gone. REED LANDS with a sharp SMACK.

REED

. . . Why'd you do that?

SUE

You're welcome.

He starts to reach out, to apologize - but lets her walk away instead.

REED [v.o.]

. . . *Spineless.*

INT. BIOLAB - DAY

A team of LAB TECHNICIANS is running our four heroes through a series of tests. REED oozes into a length of copper pipe and pops out of the other end, intact. SUE projects a BUBBLE OF FORCE around an ENGINE BLOCK . . . and LIFTS IT ten feet in the air through sheer force of will.

SUE [v.o.]

Reed has called off our quarantine. In the last 72 hours, the nanoagents in our bodies have stopped replicating . . . which means our physical transformations may be complete.

JOHNNY burns a hole in an inch-thick STEEL PLATE at a distance of twenty paces. BEN sits calmly against one wall, smoking a cigar, while a TECH bounces a full clip of .9mm rounds off his impenetrable hide.

REED [v.o.]

The nanoagents have rebuilt us from within, one cell at a time. We are no longer exactly human. What we are . . . remains to be seen.

PACE, observing from the wings, breaks into a round of WILD APPLAUSE.

PACE

Wow. I have to think there's a buck in this.
You guys are fantastic. Even the suits - ?

REED

They got infected at the same time we did.
They adapt to our bodies.

BEN

Lucky it happened to us and not Victor. You'd
have one badass psycho freak on your hands.

Suddenly ALARMS start blaring - from every computer terminal in the lab.
A ONE-WORD MESSAGE is scrolling past, over and over, on each of the
screens: **KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL . . .**

REED

What in hell is this - ?

PACE

Looks like we're being hacked, buddy!

REED

I designed that firewall myself. Nobody can get
in. Nobody but me and . . .

A final word completes the message: **KILL ME**. REED stares at it, agog.

EXT. NORTH ATLANTIC - NIGHT

A ROTATING SATELLITE DISH on the deck of the Russian freighter *Yuri Gagarin*.

INT. SHIP - COMM CENTER - NIGHT

The CRACKLE OF ELECTRICITY is in the air. A FUNKY OLD RUSSIAN
COMPUTER MONITOR - not even a flatscreen - shows WIREFRAME
MODELS of REED, SUE, BEN, and JOHNNY, along with constant updates
on their vital signs.

There's SCREAMING in the air nearby. A hunched figure wrapped in a
GREEN BLANKET is writhing on the floor, POUNDING IT in obvious
agony. In a moment the pain subsides. He collects himself . . . rises . . .

. . . and we get our first look at the new, improved VICTOR VANDAM - aka
DR. DOOM. His charred flesh has been replaced by SHINY METALLIC
SKIN. He's enveloped in an AURA of static electricity that throws off
sparks when he moves. He's a hideous amalgam of man and machine.

He rises from his seat and exits, stepping over the CORPSES of Russian sailors – who appear to have been dead for some time.

INT. SHIP'S CORRIDOR – NIGHT

DOOM makes his way down a cramped corridor littered with more bodies. As far as we can tell the entire crew of the ship is dead.

At the end of the corridor is a STEEL SAFETY DOOR covered with Cyrillic lettering which we won't be able to read. However, the RADIATION SYMBOLS and the SKULL & CROSSBONES SIGN get the point across.

DOOM stops and stares at a complicated ACCESS SYSTEM which requires keycards, access codes, etc. – which he doesn't have. So he THRUSTS HIS HANDS at the steel door instead.

As soon as he makes contact, the WHOLE CORRIDOR begins to SIZZLE with electricity – sparks and smoke everywhere.

He withdraws his hands and GRINS. His fingers have burned HOLES in the two-inch thick steel. A RED NUCLEAR GLOW shines through from the other side. He grabs the door by the fingerholds and PULLS.

WIPE TO:

EXT. WALL STREET – DAY

PACE steps out of a LIMO, surrounded by an ENTOURAGE of four or five. A gaggle of PRESS shouts out questions. He waves them aside.

Then – abruptly – PACE FREEZES. There's a GUN at his back, and another at the side of his neck. Two blank-faced RUSSIAN SAILORS have worked their way through the crowd. In perfect unison the two of them SPEAK THE SAME LINE – in a flat, zombie-like monotone:

BOTH SAILORS

Mr. Pace, you will come with us. Please step into the Checker cab.

A CAB is idling at the curb. The DRIVER is another RUSSIAN SAILOR. Still at gunpoint, PACE starts to walk toward the cab.

TWO BODYGUARDS from PACE'S ENTOURAGE pull sidearms. Each of them fires THREE QUICK SHOTS into the back of a RUSSIAN SAILOR!

One SAILOR drops to the street. The other, unaffected, keeps his gun trained on PACE and shepherds him into the cab.

Then the fallen SAILOR gets up – and shoots the BODYGUARD who shot him!! The crowd screams as the last SAILOR boards the cab and rides off with the others. The surviving BODYGUARD pulls out a cell phone . . .

BODYGUARD

Delta niner. Delta niner. Somebody's
snatched the big Kahuna!

INT. CHECKER CAB - DAY

Calypso music on the radio, PACE sweating buckets in the back. The cab runs a red light at 90 MPH.

PACE

Can't you at least tell me who you are? I'm
sure we can work it out . . . I'll pay you one
million dollars apiece to stop this cab . . .

No reply. TWO POLICE CARS with sirens blaring come off a side street and SCREECH TO A HALT, blocking the intersection up ahead. The DRIVER serenely twists the wheel to the right and SHAVES THE CORNER - going up on the sidewalk and DEMOLISHING a Sabrett's hot dog cart.

INT. POLICE VAN - DAY

A TAC TEAM has joined the chase. Up ahead the Checker cab is speeding west. A TAC COP picks up his radio mike:

TAC COP

All units. He's headed straight for the
waterfront. He won't have anyplace to go.

EXT. PIER - DAY

LONGSHOREMEN SCATTER as the cab BARRELS THROUGH a chain-link fence - noses onto a long, ramshackle wooden PIER - picks up speed . . .

. . . and HURTLES OFF into the Hudson River at 60 MPH!

The first wave of COP CARS arrives just in time to see this seeming kamikaze run. PLAINCLOTHESMEN and TAC COPS spill out onto the docks, staring at each other in disbelief, wondering what to do next.

UNDERWATER SHOT - ON CHECKER CAB

The cab descends through scummy waters, with a horrified PACE pressed up against the window like a stuffed suction-cup Garfield.

INT. CHECKER CAB - THAT MOMENT

The nose of the car hits the sandy seabed. The RUSSIAN SAILORS stare placidly ahead like weary bus riders. PACE, however, is pounding on the windows and SCREAMING like a madman.

PACE

Ten million. Ten million dollars! LET ME OUT
OF HERE!!

Now the cab comes to rest. Through the murk PACE sees something peculiar: a futuristic MINISUB is approaching the cab!!

In perfect sync, the three RUSSIAN SAILORS hit their POWER WINDOW
BUTTONS - OPENING the cab windows!

PACE'S SCREAM is abruptly cut off as a TORRENT OF WATER gushes into the cab. He manages to draw a last mouthful of air before the car fills completely. Then he frantically pulls himself through an open window.

A HATCH pops open on the underbelly of the MINISUB. PACE SWIMS for it. Behind him, in the cab, the THREE SAILORS stare calmly ahead, making no effort to escape, or to avoid drowning . . .

EXT. PIER - LATER - DAY

A team of FROGMEN climb out of the water and report to an FBI AGENT.

FROGMAN

Cab's down there. Three dead sailors, no Pace.

FBI MAN

(into cell phone)

Okay, they got him. What now?

The FBI MAN turns at the sound of DISTANT CHOPPER BLADES. A pair of HELICOPTERS bearing Russian markings is flying over the harbor, headed directly toward Wall Street.

WIPE TO:

INSERT - TELEVISION NEWS BROADCAST

A stern-faced ANCHORWOMAN at her desk, over the superimposed title "EYEWITNESS NEWS - SPECIAL BULLETIN."

ANCHORMAN

This just in: the richest man in America has been kidnapped in a daring commando-style raid. High-tech wizard Raymond Pace is being held hostage by an obscure terrorist group calling itself the Latverian Revolutionary Front.

We CUT TO grainy home-video tape of, you guessed it, a RUSSIAN SAILOR reading a prepared speech in a slow, halting monotone:

RUSSIAN SAILOR

The Latverian Evolutionary Front is holding
Raymond Pace, intellectual thief and symbol of
capitalist corruption . . . this is phase one of
our plan to paralyze the decadent capitalist
enterprise at its heart . . .

(beat)

Any attempt to interfere with our mission will
result in the destruction of New York City . . .

His speech finished, the RUSSIAN SAILOR stares at the camera with his
mouth hanging open until the tape runs out. After a moment of this, we
cut to a CORRESPONDENT live on the scene at Wall Street.

CORRESPONDENT

Still no word, Angela, on the mysterious
helicopters hovering over Wall Street . . .

INT. PACE'S BIOLAB - DAY

The lab is crawling with FBI MEN. SUE is being interrogated by lead
agent TURLEY.

TURLEY

I have to say, Miss Storm - you're one of Pace's
oldest, most trusted employees, yet I sense
you're not telling me everything you know.

SUE shoots a guilty look over at REED, who's pacing in the corner.

SUE

I don't know if it's relevant. Ray tried to cover
it up, for business reasons, but the space
station was sabotaged.

TURLEY

It's relevant. By whom?

SUE

Victor Vandam. He was . . . Latverian.

TURLEY gapes at SUE as if she's insane for holding back this info.

REED

Look. Victor's dead. He died trying to escape.
I can't imagine there's any -

TURLEY

You let us "imagine." Do you know what kind
of a mess we've got here?

He points at the TWO HELICOPTERS on the TV.

TURLEY

There's a Russian ship, the *Yuri Gagarin* . . . it
fell off the map a couple of weeks ago. We now
think these Latverians must've hijacked it.

SUE

What's that got to do with the helicopters?

TURLEY

The Russians, Miss Storm, deposit their
nuclear waste in the north Atlantic. And the
Gagarin was on a dumping run . . .

REED

I get you. A little TNT, a little nuclear waste -

SUE

What are you saying, Reed?

REED

At that altitude . . . a conventional explosion
blankets the city with radioactive fallout. Half
of Jersey, if the wind's right.

TURLEY

We can't fire a shot at those copters. We can't
do anything that might cause them to crash.
We're just hoping they don't run out of fuel.

An elevator door opens, and JOHNNY and BEN rush out breathlessly.

BEN

Reed! Did you hear about Pace? He's been -

TURLEY

JESUS!

At the sight of BEN, TURLEY and three other FBI AGENTS pull their guns.
Both BEN and JOHNNY raise their hands. REED shoots a look at SUE.

REED

Agent Turley . . . there are a couple of other
things we haven't told you.

WIPE TO:

INT. SHIP - DAY

A shellshocked, soggy RAYMOND PACE tromps down the metal corridors

of the *Yuri Gagarin*, stepping over the corpses of RUSSIAN SAILORS who look just like his captors. He arrives at the door to the OFFICER'S MESS, where a GREEN-CLOAKED FIGURE is standing in front of a portable TV, watching coverage of the Wall Street crisis.

The cloaked figure turns. His glistening metallic eyes brighten. The electric halo around his body CRACKLES. He speaks in a strange, electronically-distorted VOICE – more like three voices in harmony.

DR. DOOM

Raymond! So good to see you after all these years. I've prepared a little snack . . . coke and cookies, your favorite . . .

(extending a hand)

Victor Vandam.

The moment their hands touch, PACE gets a mild electric JOLT. He yanks his hand back in horror. DOOM pulls on a GREEN GLOVE.

PACE

Victor –! You're alive?? I thought you burned up in the stratosphere!

DOOM

I'm not just alive. I'm new and improved!

(beat)

The miracle of nanotechnology . . . somehow I fused with the shuttle's navigational system. Now I never get lost in traffic.

PACE

Where'd you get all these weird goons?

DOOM

Oh, they're dead sailors. I electrocuted most of them by accident. Then I realized they were all just lying around, going to waste . . .

DOOM spots a Russian stiff lying in one corner. FIVE LONG NEEDLES extend from the fingertips of his left hand. He kneels beside the corpse and PLUNGES the needle-fingers into its back.

An ELECTRIC CRACKLE passes between them. Little VEINS OF CHROME spread across the dead man's back. And then he GETS UP – looking just as vacuous and dead-eyed as all of DOOM's other helpers.

DOOM

Strictly menial. No higher brain functions. But they do what you say and don't complain.

PACE

You did that? With nanotechnology?
(eyes lighting up)
Cheap labor! Wow. Forget NAFTA.

DOOM

I like you, Raymond. You see everything as a business opportunity. And that's what I wanted to talk to you about.

DOOM points to the NEWS COVERAGE on the tiny TV.

DOOM

You see, I've lost something I need. I think you can help me get it back.

AERIAL SHOT - ON HELICOPTER

The REARMOST of the two helicopters hovering over Wall Street. A pair of impossibly long ARMS stretch into frame. ELONGATED HANDS grab hold of the helicopter's SKIDS . . .

EXT. WALL STREET - THAT MOMENT

ONLOOKERS gaze SKYWARD in utter amazement at the blue RUBBER BAND attached to the helicopter . . . a rubber band which now CONTRACTS UPWARD . . .

AERIAL SHOT - ON HELICOPTER

Now REED is riding the skids. He takes a moment to catch his breath.

INT. HELICOPTER - THAT MOMENT

The zombified RUSSIAN SAILOR at the controls doesn't notice REED'S HEAD as it slinks around through the open bay on a snakelike neck. It's just as he predicted: several crates of DYNAMITE in the cargo hold, plus FOUR METAL CANISTERS bearing the radioactivity symbol.

The SAILOR'S HEAD suddenly jerks to the left. A FLAMING MAN is hovering in midair alongside the helicopter. Emotionless - like all the others - he lifts a Glock and aims it at JOHNNY -

-- but before he can fire, REED'S HAND clamps over his mouth - and expands, COVERING HIS ENTIRE FACE, so that the SAILOR can neither see nor breathe. A quick YANK by REED pulls the SAILOR out of his seat - out of the cockpit, for that matter -

EXT. HELICOPTER - THAT MOMENT

- but REED HANGS ONTO HIM, and by elongating his arm lowers him to the ROOF of a skyscraper below.

SUE and BEN are there, along with an army of FBI MEN and TAC COPS, watching REED and JOHNNY. (There's also a bunch of CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT, including a CRANE - which will soon come in handy.)

INT. HELICOPTER - THAT MOMENT

JOHNNY grabs hold of the open cockpit door and flames-off. He climbs inside, settles into the pilot's seat, and grabs the joystick. REED slaps him on the back and points to the DYNAMITE in the back.

REED

Not even a spark, okay? Hold her steady.

JOHNNY

Baby food.

REED grabs a RADIOACTIVE CANISTER in either hand and lowers them to the rooftop, just as he did with the SAILOR.

EXT. ROOFTOP - THAT MOMENT

The first two cansisters are down. As REED lowers the SECOND PAIR, his right hand LOSES ITS GRIP.

The canister comes hurtling down. FBI MEN scatter. But SUE projects a FORCE CUSHION under the canister and lowers it gently to the roof.

INT. SHIP - THAT MOMENT

DOOM and PACE watching the action on TV.

DOOM

You see, Raymond, in the crash all my notes and records were destroyed. All the programming I'd done on my nanoagents was lost . . . except, of course, for what I carried in my own body. I'd need years of hard work to recover. And until then I'd be . . . incomplete.

(grinning)

Then I realized - by some miracle - my little nanoagents had survived.

PACE

(pointing at the screen)

And they're doing a heckuva job.

DOOM

Thank you, yes. But Reed's groping in the dark, Raymond. He doesn't understand the technology. He can't give you what I can.

PACE

And what am I supposed to give you?

DOOM

I'm rather like a jigsaw puzzle. I can't occupy my new body until I have all my pieces back.

(pointing at the screen)

I need . . . well, I need their blood.

EXT. HELICOPTER #1 - THAT MOMENT

REED STRETCHES out of the copter and grabs hold of COPTER #2's landing skids. This time the PILOT sees him. While REED is suspended between the two craft, the PILOT drops COPTER #2 about eight feet. The ROTORS nearly slice REED in half!

He immediately RETRACTS - snapping back to the safety of COPTER #1. JOHNNY is still at the controls . . .

JOHNNY

What happened?

No time to answer. PILOT #2 turns a MACHINE PISTOL on REED and OPENS FIRE from the copter across the way!

REED expands to cover the open entry bay of COPTER #1. The bullets strike his rubbery body, but they don't PENETRATE it - they STRETCH IT OUT to the max, forming a series of pointy STALAGMITES on his back -

- several of which SLAM INTO JOHNNY - knocking him unconscious, and making him FALL out the other side of the COPTER!!

AERIAL SHOT - ON COPTER #2

As REED's body RETRACTS, the bullets come flying out in the opposite direction, peppering the canopy of COPTER #2, and CATCHING THE PILOT at midsection. He's already dead, so no harm done. But the TAIL ROTOR of COPTER #2 begins to trail THICK OILY SMOKE.

INT. COPTER #1 - THAT MOMENT

REED turns and realizes that JOHNNY is no longer at the controls.

EXT. ROOFTOP - THAT MOMENT

SUE SHRIEKS at the sight of unconscious JOHNNY falling. Higher up, COPTER #1 is beginning to spiral out of control. The ENGINE cuts out!

INT. SHIP - THAT MOMENT

PACE is riveted to the action on the screen - pulling for our heroes.

DOOM

They're more powerful than I expected. That's why I need your help.

PACE

I dunno, Victor. Seems to me like you're trying awful hard to get those four killed.

DOOM

They're sturdy. A little radiation won't harm them.

PACE

What about the rest of Manhattan?

DOOM

What about it?

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

As JOHNNY plummets downward, he STOPS SHORT in midair - SUE has caught him on a comfy cushion of force. He comes around groggily . . .

. . . JUST AS COPTER #1 FALLS PAST the rooftop where SUE, BEN, and the FBI MEN are stationed!! REED'S still aboard. His LEFT ARM shoots out of one side and grabs the edge of the roof. His RIGHT ARM shoots out the opposite side and grabs hold of a building ACROSS THE STREET . . .

. . . and suddenly COPTER #2 is SUSPENDED between buildings, on a gigantic blue RUBBER BAND!

INT. HELICOPTER - THAT MOMENT

REED'S FACE is contorted in agony as he tries to maintain his grip. Now JOHNNY appears, hovering alongside the copter . . .

REED

Still - full - of dynamite . . .

JOHNNY flames off and hops aboard.

JOHNNY

Okay Reed - lemme get this crate started -

REED

NO. The rotors. They'll cut off my arms!

JOHNNY looks out, realizes the copter is starting to DROOP between buildings. REED'S ARMS are gradually giving way.

JOHNNY

Okay, then. We're gonna have to time this kinda cute. When I say so . . . let go . . . one side only. Can you do that? . . . Now!

REED'S RIGHT HAND lets go - he whips out of the copter, RETRACTING to the rooftop. The copter PLUMMETS - with JOHNNY still in it!

EXT. WALL STREET - THAT MOMENT

SCREAMS OF PANIC turn to WILD CHEERS as JOHNNY manages to get the rotors going and pulls the copter out of its dive!

EXT. ROOFTOP - THAT MOMENT

BEN, SUE *et al* are staring over the edge of the tower. COPTER #1 rises into view as JOHNNY brings it up. He heads off for the bay as the others help poor exhausted REED to pull himself onto the roof.

No one notices COPTER #2 hovering a few feet above the opposite building - DUMPING its lethal cargo of dynamite and nuclear waste onto the far roof. Until BEN happens to turn . . .

BEN

Hey Sue -

In rapid succession SUE'S EYES fall upon the dynamite; on COPTER #2, now rising from the opposite roof; on the SAILOR in the cockpit, raising his GUN and OPENING FIRE on the crates of high explosives . . .

With the speed of thought itself, SUE launches a FORCE BUBBLE at the crates of TNT. The first bullet beats her there. The dynamite GOES UP -

- but SUE's force field CONTAINS THE EXPLOSION. It gets bigger and bigger, putting more strain on SUE, but the BUBBLE HOLDS . . .

. . . until she COLLAPSES, shuddering, eyes glazed over, CATATONIC.

The bubble evaporates, but by now all that's left of the TNT is black smoke. The nuclear waste canisters are intact. She's saved them all, but at what cost? REED rushes to her side, cradles her head . . .

REED

Sue . . . Sue . . .

FLAMING JOHNNY touches down on the roof just in time to see her . . .

JOHNNY

SUE! WHAT HAPPENED??

BEN looks at SUE. Then at the COPTER, still hovering nearby. SHEER MURDEROUS RAGE comes into his eyes.

BEN

You - piece - of -

As he marches forward the COPTER comes straight at him. The SAILOR in the cockpit fires a barrage at him, but the bullets just bounce off his rocky hide. He reaches for the 30-foot, four-ton CRANE ARM -

- TEARS IT LOOSE from the crane, and SLINGS IT over his shoulder -
- then POINTS DELIBERATELY toward the Hudson River.

TURLEY

What the hell's he doing??

JOHNNY

Jesus Christ. He's calling his shot.

BEN takes his stance. The copter bears down.

BEN

Oh, baby . . . it's clobbering time!!!

BEN SWINGS. The COPTER goes SAILING OFF into the river. Home run!

INT. SHIP - THAT MOMENT - ON PACE

PACE looks at the screen and chuckles in admiration.

PACE

Hell of a presentation, Victor. I'm sold.

(beat)

Hey, are you okay?

DOOM is shuddering - in obvious pain. A RIPPLE travels over his chrome skin. But he forces a shaky smile.

DOOM

Growing pains. That's all. I'll be fine when I have some room to . . . expand.

EXT. WALL STREET - DAY

REED is carrying SUE in his arms as our heroes emerge from the ground floor of the skyscraper. They're immediately MOBBED by NEWS TEAMS and PHOTOGRAPHERS.

REPORTER I

Who are you? What are you?

REPORTER II

Are you guys some kind of - superheroes?

REED

We're not any kind of heroes. We're just ordinary people. Now please, let us pass!

JOHNNY

Actually, yes, we are superheroes.

JOHNNY lingers behind a moment, posing for photos, while REED carries SUE to a waiting ambulance. As he sets her down, her eyes flutter open.

SUE

Reed?

REED

Shhhh. Don't talk. You saved us all . . .

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

A COAST GUARD CLIPPER approaches a tiny LIFEBOAT bobbing in the water. In the lifeboat is a sunburned PACE. His shirt is torn, Rambo-style, and he's clutching an AK-47. He waves meekly at his rescuers.

DISSOLVE TO:

INSERT - NEWSPAPER HEADLINE

The front page of the New York *Daily Bugle* spins into frame. Above a picture of the FF in action, a banner headline screams . . .

FANTASTIC FOURSOME SAVES CITY!

And below it, in an inset, is a picture of PACE with his AK-47 . . .

Kidnaped Billionaire Takes Out Seagoing Terrorist Nest

INSERT - NEWS BROADCAST

A FLARE shoots up from the Baxter Building and EXPLODES into the fiery numeral "4," enclosed in a CIRCLE OF FLAME. BLUESCREEN HEAD

SHOTS of REED, SUE, JOHNNY, and BEN appear around it.

ANCHORWOMAN

It's official, folks. Manhattan is in love . . . with
the costumed superhumans they call the
Fantastic Four.

SNIPPETS of her speech continue under the following MONTAGE.

EXT. MIDTOWN HOTEL - DAY (MONTAGE)

A JUMPER on a ledge, forty storeys up. The usual contingent of COPS, PRIESTS and FAMILY MEMBERS plead with him from a nearby window. A CHANT rises up from the streets below: "JUMP! JUMP! JUMP!"

SCREAMS from the window as he goes over the ledge. He FALLS - six storeys, eight stories - then STOPS in midair, as if jerked up short by a bungee cord.

It's no bungee cord. It's a HAND, wrapped around the jumper's ankle. Now a HEAD dips into frame, on the end of a rubbery giraffe neck . . .

REED

Shouldn't we talk this over?

The JUMPER lets out a scream as REED pulls him up to safety.

ANCHORWOMAN [v.o.]

*They may wear colorful costumes, but these are
no comic-book superheroes. They're ordinary
New Yorkers - transformed through the miracle
of top-secret technology.*

INT. MOM & POP STORE - DAY (MONTAGE)

A LOWLIFE PUNK is holding the OWNER of the store at gunpoint. As the trembling OWNER empties the cash register, he lets out a little GASP - because he sees something the PUNK doesn't.

An ENORMOUS WHOLE SALAMI is rising up from the deli counter and FLOATING toward the register . . . seemingly of its own free will! As the OWNER stuffs the last of his cash into the PUNK'S BAG . . .

. . . the SALAMI rears back and SMACKS THE PUNK right upside the HEAD! Staggered, he drops the bag and turns. In short order, he BENDS OVER DOUBLE as if he's been socked in the gut . . .

. . . REELS BACKWARD as if he's been kneed in the chin . . .

. . . CLUTCHES HIS BALLS as if he's been kicked in the groin . . .

... and sprawls on the floor in a heap. When he finally opens his eyes, he sees HIS OWN GUN hovering in midair a quarter-inch from his nose.

SUE'S VOICE

Freeze, scumbag!

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

A tree-lined street on the upper east side. BEN strolls past a row of brownstones in his topcoat and hat. He hears a SIREN approaching...

A PRIMER-GRAY MUSTANG tears around the streetcorner at 70 MPH. Nonchalantly, BEN KICKS a STREETLIGHT - causing it to TOPPLE OVER INTO THE STREET, blocking the Mustang's path!

BEN continues on down the block, whistling. The Mustang screeches to a halt - begins to execute a U-TURN. But BEN topples a tall OAK TREE - which hits the street BEHIND the Mustang, PENNING IT IN!

POLICE CARS arrive at either end of the street to apprehend the drivers of the Mustang. A COP waves at BEN - who tips his hat and walks on.

ANCHORWOMAN [v.o.]

*And, with a cash infusion from grateful
billionaire Raymond Pace, they've just leased
space for a fabulous new research facility in
midtown's landmark Baxter Building.*

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

JOHNNY, in a new Italian suit, exits from a men's clothing store lugging bagloads of new duds. A SHRIEK comes from across the street...

WOMAN'S VOICE

MY PURSE!! STOP HIM!!

A PURSE-SNATCHER is sprinting along the opposite sidewalk, bound for a nearby SUBWAY ENTRANCE. PASSERSBY start rooting JOHNNY on, hoping to see the Torch in action. JOHNNY waves the crowd back...

JOHNNY

Fuh-laaaaaame on.

His hand ignites. He rears back and heaves a FIREBALL across the street.

INT. TAXICAB - MOVING - NIGHT

The fireball streaks directly in front of a speeding TAXI, causing the terrified DRIVER to jerk his wheel hard right.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The fireball LANDS directly in the PURSE-SNATCHER's path. It SPREADS across the sidewalk and erupts into a WALL OF FLAME!

Panicked, he does a 180. And SECOND fireball hits the sidewalk. He's penned in between the two!

JOHNNY arrives, grabs the purse, and returns it to the rightful owner -- who SPITS at the PURSE-SNATCHER in his fiery cage. The crowd breaks into SPONTANEOUS APPLAUSE as JOHNNY takes a bow.

EXT. STREET - ANOTHER ANGLE - NIGHT

Half a block away it's RAINING. The CAB has run into a FIRE HYDRANT. The owner of a corner NEWS KIOSK is ranting and raving because his stock is getting drenched. The CAB DRIVER and his PASSENGERS are shaking their fists and CURSING at the oblivious JOHNNY.

ANCHORWOMAN [v.o.]

*So when you see that blazing "4" in the sky,
don't panic. It means the Fantastic Four are on
the job!*

INT. BAXTER BLDG. - LOBBY - DAY

The lobby is CRAWLING with supplicants - DOZENS of New Yorkers, all of whom want something from the Fantastic Four. A CLAMOR goes up as BEN and SUE enter the lobby.

SCHOOLTEACHER

Miss Storm! We're having a benefit for the Save
Our Schools fund . . .

UPSET MOTHER

Mr. Grimm! Please! My little boy is in the
hospital - he's very sick - and I know a visit
from the four of you would -

CLUB OWNER

Hey, Sue. Can you get a message to Johnny?
We got a new club opening tonight. We need a
special guest DJ -

The press of bodies is so intense that BEN and SUE can't even move.

BEN

Split up. I'll meet you upstairs.

They head off in different directions, and the mob parts a little. We stay

with BEN as he works his way to the elevator . . .

TENANT

Hey, I got this landlord. Dead of winter, he won't even turn on the heat . . .

ANGRY FATHER

You. You. Rock man!

(grabbing BEN)

My daughter - my beautiful daughter - this greasemonkey mechanic got her in trouble -

BEN

Yeah? What am I supposed to -

ANGRY FATHER

Teach him a lesson! You fix his face so no woman ever look at him again! I'll pay . . .

BEN squeezes his belt buckle, firing an infrared signal. A PRIVATE ELEVATOR opens. He pushes the crowd back and steps inside.

INT. ELEVATOR - THAT MOMENT

The doors close. BEN heaves a sigh of relief . . .

BEN

Wotta revoltin' development.

SUE'S VOICE

I'll say. We can't even go out in public.

BEN is startled. SUE's invisible - he didn't realize she was in the elevator.

BEN

Susie! Why the invisible act? It's just me.

SUE'S VOICE

I - I'm not wearing my costume, Ben. I ditched my clothes to get through the crowd.

INT. BAXTER BLDG. - F.F. HQ - DAY

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS are wandering around everywhere. Beneath a great open SKYLIGHT is a futuristic VTOL AIRCRAFT - a flying four-seater in a cloverleaf design - the FANTASTICAR. REED'S HAND stretches out from beneath it in search of a tool.

BEN and the invisible SUE emerge from the elevator and find JOHNNY glued to his CEL PHONE.

JOHNNY

So what's the deal? Super bowl . . . halftime, okay . . . and I skywrite "Disneyland" over the stadium? Oh sure, just like Tinker Bell. What else have we got?

BEN

Hey Stretch - we gotta do something about the lobby scum. Susie and me barely made it to the elevator.

REED

They aren't scum, Ben. They're ordinary people who need help. You're the hero of the moment.

BEN

I don't see you down there, Mr. Social Worker.

JOHNNY

Come in through the window. That's what I do.

SUE returns, buttoning work clothes over her FF costume.

SUE

Ben's right, Reed. We can't go out without being mobbed. And we can't help everyone.

(shaking her head)

Some of the stories just break your heart . . .

BEN

I don't care about their problems. I got my own. How are we comin' on the miracle cure?

REED

Ben, I'm working every day. In the meantime, you're still the same man inside. Your looks don't bother us.

BEN

They bother me.

JOHNNY

Me too. You're friggin' hideous.

(into cel phone)

Hey! Hey! They gotta come up on the money. I don't need Bud Lite. Bud Lite needs me.

A BUZZER sounds. There's a DELIVERY MAN at the door. JOHNNY signs for an oversized cardboard BOX.

BEN

You guys can pass for normal. You control what happens to you. I'm like this all the time! . . . Well, I never signed on to be a hero. From now on, count me out.

JOHNNY

Hey! Nobody quits. It's the Fantastic Four.

BEN

Says who?

JOHNNY slides the opened CARDBOARD BOX in front of BEN. It contains toy prototypes: Fantastic Four ACTION FIGURES and TRADING CARDS.

JOHNNY

Says two million dollars. - Split four ways.

BEN pulls out an action figure in his own likeness . . .

BEN

"The Thing"?

JOHNNY

Why not? It's short. Merchandisable. That's what we gotta be - brand names!

(shrugging)

Look, it's not like we have to kill ourselves. We just show up once a week or so. Help somebody out of a jam. Stay visible! I figure we can ride this thing all the way to . . .

REED

Johnny - none of us are in this for the money.

BEN

Sure, Reed. You're some kinda rubberband messiah, right? Well, help me. Fix me. And until you do . . . I say let's cash in.

BEN storms out. JOHNNY gives him a round of polite applause - then hands out ACTION FIGURES to SUE and REED, who stare at them in total befuddlement.

INT. MASTERS' GALLERY - DAY

In the studio space in the back of the gallery, ALICIA is working on an oversized BUST. She hears the little bell that rings when a visitor enters. This particular visitor has an extremely heavy tread - every footfall makes her sculpting stand and the implements around her SHAKE.

ALICIA

Ben Grimm.

It's him all right, bundled up as usual in his topcoat and slouch hat.

BEN

How'd you know it was me?

ALICIA

You have a distinctive walk.

BEN

Yeah, I've put on a little weight. About 650 pounds.

(beat)

I came by to see if you got the check okay. I would've brought it in person, but . . .

ALICIA

I know. I've been hearing all about your exploits. I have something to show you.

The bust she's working on is a likeness of BEN, as he looked a couple of weeks ago: half of his face is covered by armor plate, but there's still a human peeking out. Not like now.

ALICIA

What do you think?

BEN

It's a little out of date. I'm not quite the pretty boy I used to be.

Immediately her hands go to his face. He's still not used to being touched, and it takes him a moment to stop squirming.

ALICIA

Sit down. I want it to be right.

He pulls up a metal workbench. Using his real face as a reference, ALICIA tears off new handfuls of fresh clay and "revises" her sculpture.

ALICIA

I was going to go with raku for the texture, but now I'm thinking I'll cast it in metal.

(beat; casually)

Are you dying, Ben?

BEN

No. It's not a disease, exactly - just a change.

ALICIA

I'm doing a show . . . me, and two other artists
. . . this piece'll be in it. Can you come to the
opening?

BEN

Alicia, you don't want me at your opening. I'd
just be taking attention from your work.

ALICIA

Because you're so famous and heroic?

BEN

You don't know how people look at me. They
stop and stare like I'm some kind of zoo animal
. . . then you got the considerate ones. "Oh,
the poor, poor man . . ."

He realizes that ALICIA is wearing a bemused smile throughout all this.
She knows a little something about the subject.

ALICIA

Why don't you hole up in a room? Don't make
friends, don't fall in love . . . eat your own bad
cooking . . . of course, on the downside, you
won't have anyone to whine to.

BEN

Yeah? What's your point?

ALICIA

I need a date.

She touches his face again. It's the first time she's caught him smiling.

CUT TO:

INT. PACE'S VR ROOM - NIGHT

It's a sandy tropical beach tonight, and PACE is enjoying a Pina Colada
under a pine tree when a WINDOW OPENS UP in the starry sky above.
DR. DOOM stares down on him with obvious displeasure.

PACE

Victor . . . ?

DOOM

The blood samples are inadequate, Raymond.
The nanoagents have stopped replicating. I
don't have enough left to reverse-engineer.

(furiously)
Grimm's sample is completely inert.

PACE
Victor, I, uh - I have no idea what that means.

DOOM
It means I am UNSTABLE!

Suddenly DOOM lets out a ROAR OF AGONY. He bends over the lab table. ELECTRICITY sparks off him in all directions.

PACE
I can see that. - Are you okay?

DOOM
Before I can enter . . . my new body . . . I will need the host organisms. All four of them.

PACE
Well, Victor, that wasn't in the deal.

INT. PACE'S BIOLAB - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

The F.F.'s old digs have been commandeered by DR. DOOM. A new version of the NANO VAT from the orbital station has been erected in the center of the biolab - full of goo, with the familiar MULTICOLORED TUBES ringing its exterior. FOUR OF THEM are conspicuously empty.

DOOM brings his fist down on a lab table, shattering equipment . . .

DOOM
Come here, Raymond. I must speak to you.
Immediately.

Before PACE can protest, DOOM switches off his monitor, killing the video link. His BACK ARCHES in pain, and a WEIRD RIPPLING EFFECT passes over his chrome face. He drops to the floor, SCREAMING.

INT. PACE'S BIOLAB - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dark, except for the eerie glow of the NANO VAT. PACE enters, sees no trace of DOOM.

PACE
Victor? Victor, it's me . . .

A LOW MOAN. PACE sees DOOM's limp figure sprawled face down behind a lab table. He crouches - turns DOOM over - and RECOILS in shock!

PACE

JESUS!!

The chrome mask is GONE – replaced by the agonized, flame-scarred face of VICTOR VANDAM. He speaks in a low, rasping *human* voice – undistorted by DOOM's electronic harmony effect.

VICTOR

Have to . . . understand, Raymond . . . it was never me. It was . . . them.

PACE

Who??

VICTOR

Nanoagents. They've developed their own intelligence. They've crowded me out . . . of my own brain . . .

PACE

What do they want??

VICTOR

Can't hold on much longer. Kill me, Raymond. For God's sake . . . kill me.

PACE sputters helplessly, waving his hands in the air: *how?*

VICTOR

Guns – in the testing area . . .

Now PACE remembers. They were blasting shells off BEN's rocky hide. He fetches the gun, returns, and stands over VICTOR, trembling.

VICTOR

HURRY.

PACE aims at VICTOR'S HEAD and pulls the trigger. Again. And again. And again. From the look on his face, the floor of the lab must be an absolutely gruesome sight. He lowers the gun shakily. Then . . .

VICTOR [o.s.]

Too late. I . . . can't . . . die.

(beat)

Reed – tell Reed – he's the only hope . . .

PACE watches in horror as the headless body stands – and the chrome face of DOOM forms itself anew.

DOOM

What did he tell you, Raymond? Ah, yes . . . we have access to his memories, you know . . . he told you to fetch Reed.

PACE can't help it. As DOOM advances on him, he CRIES LIKE A BABY.

DOOM

That's an excellent idea. Why don't you do that for me? Why don't you fetch Reed?

DOOM claps his hands around PACE's rib cage and lifts him effortlessly into the air. PACE'S EYES go wide as TEN NEEDLES sprout from DOOM's fingertips - and PLUNGE INTO HIS BACK.

PACE

Oh . . . wow.

DOOM'S MANIACAL LAUGHTER segues into:

INT. CBS 'LATE SHOW' THEATRE - NIGHT

White-haired DAVID LETTERMAN at his desk, leading a packed audience in a round of LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE.

LETTERMAN

Let's welcome . . . THE HUMAN TORCH!

WILD WHOOPS for JOHNNY, who saunters out looking like fresh money in a \$4000 Italian suit. He takes a seat beside DAVE.

LETTERMAN

I forgot to mention this before, but I did want to thank you for saving all of Manhattan.

JOHNNY spreads his hands, grins. *De nada*. The crowd explodes.

LETTERMAN

. . . Now what are you going to do about the Knicks?

INT. BAXTER BLDG. - MEDIA CENTER - NIGHT

An excited SUE calls REED over from the lab area to watch the show.

SUE

Reed! Hurry up! Johnny's on!

REED takes a seat beside her just in time to see LETTERMAN shuffling through PHOTOS of the Fantastic Four in action.

LETTERMAN

Now this one here – the Gumby imitator. He goes by the name “Mister Fantastic” . . . ?

JOHNNY

Yeah, that’s what the ladies call him.

WHOOPS and WHISTLES from the audience. LETTERMAN wiggles his eyebrows and holds his hands up, roughly six inches apart.

LETTERMAN

And that, I take it, is because of his ability to expand. To . . . any length.

Now he holds his hands twelve inches apart.

JOHNNY

Longer.

LETTERMAN

(eighteen inches apart)

That is fantastic.

JOHNNY

Longer.

LETTERMAN

I think we’re getting into “Mr. Mexican Floor Show” here. Now this next one . . .

REVERSE ANGLE – ON REED

Pale as a ghost. He’s never been so mortified in his life. He can’t even bring himself to look at SUE. She takes his hand consolingly.

SUE

Oh, Reed, it’s just a stupid joke. No one’s up this late anyway.

Onscreen, LETTERMAN is holding up the glossy photo of SUE.

LETTERMAN

Now. Why is this woman smiling? – Or has she been out back with “Mister Fantastic”?

WILD WHOOPS and DOG BARKS from the audience.

LETTERMAN

Now tell the truth. When she turns invisible – she just dumps the suit, right? She’s running around butt-nekkid.

JOHNNY

She says it helps her fight crime.

LETTERMAN CRACKS UP. The audience goes into hysterics – but on the sofa, SUE is turning bright red, ashamed to look at REED.

INT. "LATE SHOW" STUDIO – THAT MOMENT

JOHNNY

And last but not least – the Big Orange Pile of Petrified Moose Turds. That's his full name. We call him the Pile. I mean, the Thing.

LETTERMAN

What exactly is the fashion statement here?

INT. GRIMM'S YANCY STREET TAVERN – THAT MOMENT

BEN at the bar, the surviving members of the YANCY STREET GANG gathered behind him, all watching Letterman. Needless to say, the Yancy Streeters are HOWLING WITH LAUGHTER at JOHNNY's wisecracks.

JOHNNY [onscreen]

He fell into a vat of radioactive Clearasil.

(pause)

Actually, the idea is, he's supposed to frighten evildoers. Unfortunately he also has that effect on women – children – small animals –

INT. BAXTER BLDG. – UNDERGROUND GARAGE – NIGHT

BEN enters on foot and finds a stall marked "RESERVED FOR JONATHAN STORM." Parked there is a meticulously restored, cherry-red '62 PORSCHE – with the vanity plate "TORCH 1."

BEN carefully removes the plate and rolls up his sleeves.

CUT TO:

EXT. CBS STUDIOS – STAGE DOOR – NIGHT

JOHNNY emerges and is immediately mobbed by cheering teenagers, tourists, hookers, clubhoppers, etc. – his popularity cuts across every demographic. Grinning, JOHNNY signs autographs by SCORCHING THE PAGE with a burning fingertip.

Two GIGGLY COLLEGE GIRLS fight through to the front of the crowd.

GIRL I

My friend wants to ask you a question.

JOHNNY

Don't be shy.

GIRL II

Do you smoke in bed?

He does a take. Fights back a smirk. Thank heaven for little girls.

JOHNNY

You know the little bar around the corner?
Why don't you wait for me and we'll . . . discuss
this further.

The GIRLS practically swoon. As they scurry around the corner, JOHNNY autographs a glossy photo and a magazine cover. The next guy in line hands him an OVERSIZED MANILA ENVELOPE. He blinks . . .

JOHNNY

Hey, what's this?

PROCESS SERVER

Mr. Storm? Consider yourself served.

INT. BAXTER BLDG. - LAB AREA - MORNING

TIGHT on an electron-microscope magnification of SUE'S BLOOD, which is swirling with microorganisms and NANOAGENTS.

SUE HERSELF is watching the image on an oversized screen. She types a command, brings up an image of a DNA strand. She's so intent on her work that she JUMPS when REED wanders up to peek over her shoulder.

REED

You're at it bright and early. Who's the patient?

SUE

Me. - We've been altered so much, and I just
wanted to know . . . it's nothing.

REED

What?

SUE

I want to know if I can have children.

REED

Sue! Are you pregnant?

SUE

When would I get pregnant, Reed? I spend all my time holed up in here with you and the boys.

REED

I dunno. I thought . . . maybe . . . Pace?

She gives him a look of SHUDDERING REVULSION: Pace?!!? Then, properly offended, she returns to her microscope-gazing.

SUE

For your information, I haven't had an actual date in a year and a half.

He hovers around behind her, shifting his weight from one foot to another, looking as if he's about to say something. She's about to snap at him when she hears JOHNNY entering in the next room.

A better target for her mounting wrath. She marches in and SLAPS HIM HARD across the face.

SUE

How could you, Johnny? On national TV. How could you?

He shambles past, so preoccupied he barely even registers the slap.

SUE

If you have to be in the limelight making your cheap little smutty jokes, fine. But it doesn't have to be at my expense. Or Reed's. Or -

JOHNNY

I don't know what to do, Sue.

(collapsing into a chair)

I'm being sued for 4.3 million dollars.

SUE blinks in shock. JOHNNY offers the manila envelope for her perusal.

JOHNNY

I threw a fireball at a purse snatcher. And there was this cab . . . it swerved . . .

SUE

The cab driver's suing you?

JOHNNY

And the passengers. And the newsstand guy.

Now REED arrives. He grabs the legal papers out of SUE's hands.

SUE

Who's the newsstand guy?

JOHNNY

The cab hit a fire hydrant. And the guy's entire stock got . . . it doesn't matter. They got an injunction, Sue. I'm in violation of the fire code. I can't even flame on!!

REED

Johnny, this lawsuit names us.

JOHNNY

Fantastic Four, Inc. - I mean, cripes, Sue, I was just trying to do some good - stick my neck out, help people in need - and what do I get? I'll probably have to sell my Porsche!

(looking toward the door)

What's that?

SUE

Ben dropped it off late last night.

There's a great big CUBE sitting by the doorway - three feet square and gift-wrapped, with a pink BOW. JOHNNY tries to lift it . . . and can't.

He tears the paper away, revealing a neat block of CRUMPLED METAL - gray, and chrome, and bright cherry red. He doesn't know what it is, at first. Then he sees the license plate - TORCH 1 - and he goes pale.

JOHNNY

Where is he? I'm gonna fricassee his fat ass!

He runs to the window, throws it open, starts to bound off into midair.

SUE

Johnny! The injunction!

Sputtering in frustration, JOHNNY climbs down off the windowsill and runs to the door instead. SUE heaves a sigh as he leaves.

SUE

Looks like we're down to the Fantastic Three.

REED

Fantastic Two, if he fricassees Ben.

SUE heads back to her microscope. REED clears his throat awkwardly.

REED

You know, Sue, if it wouldn't interfere with
your research - I'd like to take you out somet—

She jumps in before he has a chance to finish the sentence.

SUE

When?

INT. SUE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SUE applying makeup in a mirror. She starts to FADE OUT unexpectedly . . . so that nothing remains, except for a pair of bright red LIPSTICK LIPS hovering in midair.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

REED adjusting his tie in the mirror, wanting to look Just Right. He stares at his HAIR. He doesn't like the way it's parted, and decides to brush it STRAIGHT BACK.

But he doesn't use a brush. He now has complete mental control of EVERY FOLLICLE OF HAIR on his head. His hair reorganizes and falls into place ALL BY ITSELF.

INT. RESTAURANT DANIEL - NIGHT

If not Restaurant Daniel, then whatever joint happens to be the hot ticket in 2008 New York. REED and SUE are an emotionally constipated duo - they want each other so badly that they're terrified of making a bad impression, and their dinner chat is full of awkward pauses and miscommunications. Their problems would vanish if they just hopped in the sack, but they won't get to do that for a while yet. Bear with them.

SUE

It was an online thing . . . we were trading e-mails on this technical problem, and it got flirtatious, and then, boom, we were engaged.

REED

Before you even met him?

SUE

That's just it. His mind was the part I loved. I always thought looks didn't matter! - That was before I saw him in person.

(long, rueful pause)

He was thirteen.

REED LAUGHS. SUE looks wounded - so he stops laughing instantly.

SUE

So much for my taste in men, huh?

Now REED looks wounded. Mortified, SUE picks up a big slice of bread and BUTTERS IT obsessively . . . until she realizes REED is staring at her.

REED

You're not supposed to do that.

SUE

What?

REED

Butter the whole piece. My first job, in Silicon Valley, the company had us take a whole course in table manners so we could go out to dinner with big European investors . . .

SUE

Then how do you do it?

REED

Break off little pieces and butter them individually!

SUE stares at her fully-buttered slice. REED turns suddenly morose.

REED

And of course you never . . . ever . . . criticize someone else's table manners. I'm such a -

Now they're both distraught. SUE flags down the SOMMELIER:

SUE

Could we have a different bottle of wine?

SOMMELIER

Certainly, ma'am. Is there something wrong with this one?

SUE

It's not working.

The SOMMELIER nods and moves on. REED blurts out . . .

REED

Sue, I'm sorry. I have this condition! I have Asperger's Syndrome!

SUE

Asperger's Syndrome?

REED

It primarily affects the children of engineers. I have an uncanny focus on technical problems, endeavors, abstract ideas – but I can't read what other people are feeling.

SUE

You can't?

REED

Ben. All through school I thought Ben was my best friend. Then I found out my dad was paying him five dollars a week to keep the other kids from beating me up!

SUE

He is your friend, Reed. People feel the same way that you feel in your heart about them.

REED

No, I don't believe they do.

SUE

They do. Believe me.

REED

Not in my experience.

He won't take a hint. SUE screws up her courage. It's now or never . . .

SUE

Reed, I'm so in love with you that half the time I just want to explode.

The last time we saw this look on REED's face, he was being sucked into the vacuum of deep space.

SUE

. . . Didn't you know?

He's so thunderstruck that his face goes slack – *good* and slack. He loses control of his facial muscles to the point where it looks like his features are going to slide right off his skull onto the dinner table.

Embarrassed for him, SUE reaches over and tries to gather up his face before the other diners notice. He finally realizes what's happening, and his face snaps back into place.

REED

Sorry. Sorry. I'm fine. CHECK, PLEASE.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

REED and SUE ambling beneath a stone bridge in a deserted section of the park. Suddenly the moonlight catches her profile just so . . .

REED

I remember seeing you that first day on the Pogo flight . . . all framed by starlight . . . and you asked me if all my dreams come true.

SUE

Do they?

REED

I didn't even dare to dream of you. I just kept wondering: what kind of man does she like? Tall, dark and handsome?

REED MORPHS into a taller, square-jawed version of himself. SUE lets out a small, shocked laugh.

REED

Or big and muscular, like Mr. Universe?

He swells to Arnoldesque proportions, nearly popping out of his coat.

REED

And some girls go for short and cuddly . . .

He turns into a beach ball on little bow legs. SUE can't help laughing.

SUE

No, I like 'em brilliant. And brave. About this tall - maybe a little gray around the temples.

Suddenly serious, he takes SUE by the shoulders, looks her in the eyes.

REED

I'm not noble and heroic, Sue. That was just another face I tried on to impress you.

SUE

Then let's pretend none of it ever happened. I just want to be normal. To be with you.

(beat)

I finished running our DNA maps. Variance from normal's under point one percent.

REED

And?

SUE

We could have kids, you and I.

REED

Are you proposing to me?

She nods yes. His arms wrap around her . . . and wrap around her, and wrap around her again . . . and by the time he's finished, his arms have encircled her so many times that it looks like the two of them are sharing a COCOON. They kiss.

WIPE TO:

INT. PACE'S VIRTUAL-REALITY ROOM - DAY

Today's selection is the Hawaiian black-sand beach. A jubilant REED flashes an enormous GRIN:

REED

Raymond, I brought you a little surprise.
Honey -- ?

SUE wanders in demurely - WAVES as REED puts an arm around her.

PACE

Sue! I didn't know you'd be coming . . .

PACE is sitting behind a huge MAHOGANY DESK. He doesn't look a bit happy to see her.

REED

We have a little announcement to make. We wanted you to be the first to know . . . Sue and I are getting married.

For just an instant, a WEIRD EXPRESSION comes over PACE'S FACE - a mixture of shock, dismay and guilt. Then he forces a big smile.

SUE

We thought - since you were the one who brought us together -

REED

- that you should get first crack at kissing the bride. To be.

She starts toward the desk. He silently mouths the words "GET OUT."

SUE

Are you okay, Raymond?

PACE

Thrilled. I called you in on some business, Reed, but give the circumstances, I think it can certainly wait.

A furtive glance around the room – and again, the silent words “GET OUT.” SUE and REED exchange a troubled look.

REED

Raymond, if something's bothering you, I wish you'd come right out and say it.

PACE

No. I'm just happy. I'm so happy. I . . .
(giving up on the act)

Run. For Christ's sake, run. Get the hell out of –

Abruptly, PACE'S BACK ARCHES. He lets out a blood-curdling SCREAM. Writhing in agony, he begins to SINK DOWN behind the desk.

REED and SUE rush to his side – and GASP IN HORROR.

PACE is not sitting in a chair. He's FLOATING in a small VAT of NANO-GOO. His bottom half is already LIQUID – has been, all along – and now his TOP HALF is DISSOLVING, sinking slowly into the muck!

Staring helplessly at the vat, REED and SUE don't notice the IMAGE changing on the four walls of the VR room . . . changing to four gigantic, looming CLOSEUPS of DR. DOOM!

DOOM

Congratulations, kids. From your dear old pal.

REED

. . . Victor?!?

SUE

How? You were dead.

DOOM

So were you. Curiosity killed the cat . . . nanotechnology brought him back.

(beat)

Don't worry about Pace. I can reconstruct him if I need him.

PACE'S HEAD pops up out of the vat and SHRIEKS – just long enough to scare the bejeezus out of SUE and REED. Then it DISSOLVES again. DOOM's weird, electronically-distorted LAUGHTER fills the room.

DOOM

My body is very unstable. You might say I'm overpopulated. But before I move on to roomier quarters . . . there's something I need from you.

The east wall of the VR room SHATTERS, DOOM's image collapsing into a thousand shards. The three remaining DOOMS smile as the east wall begins to MOVE IN on REED and SUE.

Its surface is studded with HUNDREDS of razor-sharp NEEDLES.

DOOM

Alas, I'll have to drain you dry to get it - !

REED

Sue! Can you project a -

SUE

Already on it, Reed.

She projects a SHIMMERING CUSHION OF FORCE between the two of them and the wall - slowing, but not stopping, the progress of the needles.

REED

Victor - don't do this - it doesn't have to be this way. We can work together. We can cure what's happened to us . . .

DOOM

I'm not sick, Reed. I'm evolving.

REED

It's not you, Victor. It's the nanoagents. They've affected your mind. It isn't you!!

MORE STRAIN on SUE's force bubble. She can barely maintain it . . .

REED

Victor! We were friends once! You were always a good man. HELP US, Victor!!

DOOM grimaces in sudden pain. His CHROME FACE starts to ripple -

DOOM

NO-O-O-O!! Not NOW!!

SUE's about to collapse. But suddenly, the wall of needles STOPS -

- and when REED looks up at the video wall, the face of DOOM has been replaced by that of the agonized VICTOR VANDAM.

VICTOR

I can only give you a moment, Reed. They're snuffing me out . . .

REED

Sue! Try the video walls. There's got to be a pressure point -

SUE begins firing FORCE BLASTS randomly at the walls -

VICTOR

Stop them, Reed. Find my body. Destroy it.
Make damn sure there's nothing left!!

The west screen SHATTERS - revealing, behind it, the computer-imaging gear that makes the VR room work. SUE crawls through - but REED lingers behind, watching the spectacle of VICTOR's agony.

VICTOR

I'm dying, Reed . . . they've won . . . forgive me
. . . forgive me . . .

COOL HARD CHROME begins to replace his charred flesh.

SUE

Reed! COME ON!!

EXT. PACE'S HOUSE - DAY

REED and SUE shamble out, exhausted, clinging to each other.

REED

We have to get back. Warn the others.

SUE

Reed . . . does it have to be like this? Will it
always be like this?

WIPE TO:

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - NIGHT

The familiar FLARE rockets from the roof of the building and bursts into a fiery "4."

INT. DOWNTOWN BAR - NIGHT

A BARTENDER sets down a three-liqueur concoction and TOPS IT with a layer of rum. A drunken JOHNNY ignites the rum with a fingertip, then holds the fingertip to his lips: shhh. Don't tell on me.

Beside him on the bar is a copy of the *Post*, with the headline . . .

BROOKLYN TENEMENT INFERNO
Kids Touch Off Blaze; "We Were Playing Human Torch"

An UPSCALE COUPLE exits the bar, pausing to SCOWL at JOHNNY.

EXT. MASTERS GALLERY - NIGHT

From the blazing "4" in the sky, we TILT DOWN to the gallery window. Lower-Manhattan wine-and-cheese scavengers, a JAZZ TRIO playing tasteful music – and, naturally, a bunch of new artwork on display.

INT. MASTERS GALLERY - NIGHT

ALICIA is working the crowd, accepting compliments and congratulations. One whole wall is given over to her new stuff – busts and statuettes cast in MIXED METALS, randomly mixed streams of copper, bronze, silver, etc., which produce distinct and striking VEINS OF COLOR.

A downtown couple is clucking over her bust of BEN . . .

MARCUS

– it's out of place, that's all. It's cashing in. It looks like something you'd see at a sci-fi convention.

WOMAN

Harry, she's blind. She's not deaf.

ALICIA pretends not to have heard. She sidelines her agent, DIANE:

ALICIA

Selling any?

DIANE

Three so far. And a couple of fish on the line.

ALICIA

Seen my date?

DIANE

Still back in the studio. I can't get him out.

INT. GALLERY – STUDIO AREA – THAT MOMENT

The studio's been CURTAINED OFF for the opening. ALICIA enters. BEN is sitting alone on the metal bench, with a bottle of wine and a plastic cup.

ALICIA

Ben?

He stands up. He's wearing a newly-made CUSTOM SUIT and a necktie. He redefines Big & Tall. He looks ludicrous and he knows it.

ALICIA

If you don't give people a chance to know you,
they'll always judge you by the way you look.
They'll never see the man I see inside you.

BEN

Christ, Alicia, you don't even know how
beautiful you are.

ALICIA

Then tell me.

She takes his face in both hands and pulls him forward for a kiss.

INT. GALLERY - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

ALICIA leads him out into the gallery. One of the JAZZ MUSICIANS hits a sour note at the sight of him. He feels like a gorilla on a leash as the tiny blind sculptress introduces him to her tony friends . . .

ALICIA

I'd like you to meet my friend Ben Grimm.

He extends a hand to an ART CRITIC, who seems reluctant to shake it.

BEN

Don't worry. It ain't contagious.

The CRITIC shakes hands - WINCING at BEN's grip.

ALICIA

Ben, this is my friend Duncan. Ben posed for
one of the cast-metal pieces.

DUNCAN

Really? Which one?

This gets a BIG YOICK from the nearby partygoers. As BEN continues to move through the crowd, he sees what ALICIA cannot: the other guests gradually backing away . . . the averted gazes, the whispered comments, the QUIET LAUGHTER at his expense.

ALICIA goes to get him a glass of wine. BEN strolls past her cast-metal pieces. He quickly realizes he's the only one on that side of the room.

He turns suddenly. Sure enough, EVERYONE IS STARING at him.

BEN

Okay, cough it up. A buck apiece, let's go.
You. You. Gimme a dollar.

GUEST

What?

BEN

Gimme a dollar, lameass. Ain't you ever been
to the circus? You wanna see the freaks, you
pay in advance.

He RIPS THE JACKET OFF HIS BACK – throws it, in tatters, to the floor.
Then the necktie, then the shirt. Eyes blazing, he strikes a ferocious pose
and GROWLS at the crowd . . . like a caged animal. Several of the
GUESTS back away in fright.

BEN

This is what you want, right? Step right up.
See "The Thing." You can touch him if you
wanna. How about it? You – touch me!

The MAN touches him – gingerly. BEN ROARS. The MAN jumps a foot.
Now BEN comes up to the COUPLE we saw earlier.

BEN

How about you, lady? Touch me. 'Cause I
know what you're thinking, and yeah, it's true –
I'm like this all over.

MARCUS

You're not just a freak. You're an asshole.

That's all the excuse BEN needs. He grabs MARCUS, hoists him into the
air, waves him around overhead as if he were a rag doll. MARCUS
SCREAMS as BEN carries him toward the plate-glass window. Then . . .

ALICIA

BEN – !

BEN freezes in his tracks at the sound of her voice.

ALICIA

Ben . . . please . . . don't hurt anyone. Don't.

BEN'S FACE contorts in agony. TEARS begin to stream down his face. By
the time he sets MARCUS down, he's crying like a child.

BEN

I'm sorry. I'm sorry – for what – I am.

He staggers through the door and races off down the street. An audible SIGH OF RELIEF passes through the room . . . and moments later the crowd is buzzing with jokes and laughter about what they've just seen.

DUNCAN

Hey, do you think he'd come to my opening?

ALICIA PIVOTS toward the sound of the voice - lets fly with a vicious BACKHAND that almost knocks DUNCAN off his feet.

ALICIA

That man saved your ignorant life. He saved everyone in this room . . . in this city. How dare you.

DEAD SILENCE as ALICIA gropes her way to the door to follow BEN.

INT. LIMOUSINE - THAT MOMENT - POV SHOT

THROUGH THE WINDOW we see ALICIA emerging from the gallery, turning this way and that . . .

ALICIA

Ben? Where are you? Ben?

EXT. GALLERY - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

The stretch limo pulls up alongside ALICIA. A strangely distorted, metallic VOICE comes from within . . .

DOOM [o.s.]

Young lady. Are you looking for Ben Grimm?

ALICIA

Yes.

DOOM [o.s.]

So am I. Come with me.

ALICIA

Who are you?

DOOM [o.s.]

I'm his doctor.

A GREEN-GLOVED HAND extends from the limo door. She takes it . . .

INT. GRIMM'S YANCY STREET TAVERN - NIGHT

BEN, at the bar, throws back his fifth boilermaker of the past hour. He slams his shot glass down, demanding #6. ERNIE is reluctant.

ERNIE

Slow down, willya, Ben?

BEN

Slow down? I weigh nine hundred pounds,
Ernie. Do you know how much booze it takes
to get me drunk??

The PHONE RINGS over by the register. ERNIE picks it up.

ERNIE

Grimm's Tavern.

(beat; surprised)

It's for you.

INTERCUT - BEN AND ALICIA

She stands in darkness in PACE'S BIOLAB. A green-cloaked figure is just visible in the shadows behind her.

ALICIA

Ben! I've been calling all over! It's the most
wonderful news.

(beat)

I'm here with your doctor. There's been a
breakthrough, Ben. He thinks he can cure
you!

BEN

My doctor . . . ?

ALICIA

That's right. Doctor von Doom!

It takes BEN a couple of seconds to process this bizarre bit of information
- but by the time he figures it out, his blood is running cold.

INT. BIOLAB - NIGHT

The door flies open and BEN bursts in. There are no lights on - except for
the eerie GLOW of the NANO VAT.

He turns at the sound of STATIC ELECTRICITY crackling in the shadows.
Finally VICTOR steps out - and turns on the lights.

BEN

Victor. Christ, you're uglier than I am.

DOOM

Low self-esteem was never my problem.

BEN

Where is she, Victor? If you've touched her –

DOOM

She's sleeping peacefully. Trust me.

BEN

Trust you? You're the one who turned me into
... this.

DOOM

That's what I don't understand, Ben. If you
don't like the way you are, why don't you
change back?

BEN

What are you talking about?

DOOM

Change back! The others can do it.

(beat)

The nanoagents work in concert with your
nervous system. When you don't need your
armor any more, just wish it away!

BEN

Don't you think I've tried?

DOOM

Then there's something gravely wrong with
your nervous system.

BEN

Or your programming!

DOOM turns away with a dismissive snort. BEN swings at him –
– but DOOM CATCHES the massive fist in midair – and pushes it back.
He's almost as strong as Ben – and, as a bonus, he's ELECTRICALLY
CHARGED. He sends BEN sprawling with a 10,000-volt SHOCK.

DOOM

Why do you fight me? Don't you know I can
grant your wish? Alicia wasn't lying, Ben.

BEN

Can you change me back to a man?

DOOM

Of course. If you like, bring me a bag of table
scraps, and I'll change that into a man.

BEN

Okay . . . what's the catch?

DOOM extends a hand to help BEN up from the floor - and flashes a huge metallic GRIN.

INT. BIOLAB - NIGHT

BEN is strapped to a vertical GURNEY off to one side of the burbling NANO VAT. PLASTIC TUBING runs from the underside of his TONGUE - the only part of his body that can be penetrated by a needle - and BLOOD is running through the tubes.

The tubes run in a tangled circuit through DOOM's analyzing devices. He watches SCROLLING READOUTS on half a dozen monitors at once.

Now he turns a tiny spigot - and TWO DROPS of BEN'S BLOOD empty onto a SLIDE. He slips it under a conventional microscope. A look of DEEP CONCERN crosses his chrome face.

DOOM

Renegade agents.

BEN

(mouth full of tubing)

Whuhh - ?

DOOM

Renegade agents. Flawed programming. A dropped line of code, I don't know. They're disrupting the neural link . . . that's why you can't control your transformations!

BEN

Peek Ngluh, yeu -

DOOM

What?

BEN reaches up with one hand and RIPS THE TUBING from his mouth.

BEN

Speak English!!

DOOM

DAMMIT. You idiot. Why did you -

DOOM kneels beside the gurney. BEN'S BLOOD is dripping all over the floor. As DOOM'S HAND reaches down to retrieve the tubing . . .

. . . SIX TINY DROPLETS of blood JUMP UP off the floor and ATTACH

themselves to his hand like LEECHES! After a second they SINK IN – his system ABSORBING the blood, as we saw before with SUE and REED –

– and DOOM SHRIEKS!! He staggers backward, holds his hand out at arm's length. It appears to be FROZEN STIFF. ORANGE THREADLIKE VEINS are beginning to spread across its surface, up toward his forearm.

HOWLING IN AGONY, DOOM GRIPS the afflicted arm just below the shoulder. PLUNGES HIS FINGERS deep into the metallic flesh of his biceps. JERKS HIS SHOULDER BACK . . .

. . . and RIPS THE ARM CLEANLY OUT OF ITS SOCKET!!

Gasping for breath, he hurls the bad arm to the floor. He looks up at BEN – who's been CHORTLING MERRILY at the spectacle of DOOM's pain.

BEN

Guess there's some bad blood between us.

DOOM starts to whack him – then remembers he's got more important business. He stares down at his shoulder, CONCENTRATES and begins sprouting a NEW ARM.

BEN

How about it, big brain – can you fix me or not?

DOOM

I can. Yes. It'll take longer . . . I'll have to filter the renegade agent out of your system . . .

BEN

Then let's get back to work.

CLOSEUP – BEN'S FACE

HIS WEARY EYES CLOSE. We PAN around the lab in a series of TIME DISSOLVES as the night wears on – following the TUBING in BEN'S MOUTH to DOOM'S MACHINES and MONITORS . . . to a rack of TEST TUBES, filling with blood a drop at a time . . . to a FILTRATION DEVICE extracting the renegade nanoagents from BEN's bloodstream . . .

. . . to the NANO VAT, where we see ONE of the four empty tubes beginning to fill with colored GOO . . .

. . . and when we've come a full 360°, we are no longer staring at the hideous visage of The Thing. BEN GRIMM is human once again.

A GLOVED METAL HAND reaches into frame and SLAPS HIM briskly.

DOOM

Wake up.

INT. BIOLAB - DAY

BEN stares down at his new - that is to say, *old* - body, as DOOM unstraps him from the gurney. Unsteady in his new sleek frame, he stumbles over to a FULL-LENGTH MIRROR and stares at himself.

He laughs so hard that TEARS roll down his cheeks. He's so full of gratitude that he tries to give DOOM a bear hug - but DOOM's little halo of electricity flares up, and he backs off.

BEN

Can I see her? Can I show her what's -

DOOM

Not yet, Ben. You're forgetting your part of the bargain.

BEN stares glumly at the floor. For a moment, he *had* forgotten.

BEN

Let her go, Victor. I won't cross you.

DOOM

I know you won't. And to show my gratitude I'm going to offer you a little - incentive.

He flips on a MONITOR showing a closed-circuit feed from the room where ALICIA is being held captive. She's on a gurney, with an IV FEED hooked up to one arm. The IV BOTTLE contains COLORED NANOGOO.

BEN

Victor . . .

DOOM

Why so angry? Don't you want her to see your new look?

BEN

You mean -

DOOM

I'm fixing her for you! You can stare into her limpid pools of blue and she'll stare right back at yours. - Assuming you cooperate.

BEN stares at ALICIA agonized. But he's already made his choice . . .

INT. BAXTER BLDG. - MORNING

JOHNNY enters and is met by the grim duo of SUE and REED.

JOHNNY

Great news. Nobody in the lobby.

SUE

Where have you been?

JOHNNY

Drunk, okay? And I got a deadly hangover. No crimefighting for me before noon at the earliest.

REED

We're all in danger, Johnny. Victor's alive -

JOHNNY

What??

REED

- or some semblance of Victor. Apparently he was so full of nanoagents that they overran his body - developed their own consciousness.

JOHNNY

What's that got to do with us?

REED

He, or it, or they - want what's in our blood and tissue. They'll kill us to get it.

The elevator opens, and the newly humanized BEN enters, carrying a BRIEFCASE. For a beat or two nobody seems to realize he's changed.

BEN

Hiya, hothead.

JOHNNY

Hiya, Major. WHA -

JOHNNY does a take. He runs over, claps BEN on the shoulders. SUE lets out a yell at the sight of him, wraps him up in a big bear hug.

SUE

Reed! Isn't it incredible? Look!

Beaming, BEN spreads his arms in a vaudeville pose - *ta daaaaa!* REED looks at his eyes - and gets a very odd sinking feeling.

BEN

Yeah. I guess the nanoagents finally kicked in. Now I can control it - just like you guys.

REED

You can change back and forth.

BEN

Yeah.

REED

Change.

BEN just stares at him. REED'S HAND snakes out at lightning speed and BACKHANDS HIM across the face.

BEN

Reed! What the hell are you . . .

REED'S FIST shoots out and punches him in the nose, drawing blood.

REED

Change.

(no response)

What'd you promise him, Ben?

BEN stares at him for a long moment. He can't even manage to lie.

BEN

He won't kill you, Reed. There's no need for him to kill any of us.

JOHNNY

What? Who??

BEN'S BRIEFCASE EXPLODES. There's a CLUSTER BOMB inside - TWO DOZEN SMALLER BOMBS fly off in all directions, EXPLODING THEMSELVES the moment they make contact with walls or floors . . .

Within moments, a THICK CLOUD of impenetrable GAS has filled the room. And by the time it begins to clear, FOUR UNCONSCIOUS FIGURES are sprawled on the floor . . .

INT. BIOLAB - DAY

SUE and REED are strapped to upright gurneys, tangled up in rubber TUBING which conveys their blood to DOOM's bank of machinery. Their eyes are open but GLAZED - they're wearing BIZARRE HELMETS which deliver a JOLT OF ELECTRICITY every few seconds.

JOHNNY is in a SEALED PLEXIGLAS WATER TANK. There's maybe an inch of air at the top of the tank - and the oxygen is being pumped in in a precisely regulated flow. He has to mash his face up against the front of the tank just to breathe. TUBES run from his body as well.

DOOM

Don't struggle, Johnny. There's not enough oxygen. And don't try to "flame on" - you'll asphyxiate.

JOHNNY

(re: REED and SUE)

What are you doing to them?

DOOM

They're a bit harder to handle than you. The helmets deliver a periodic shock to the cortex - it's like a constant epileptic seizure. They can't concentrate long enough to use their powers.

He walks around the lab TURNING OFF SPIGOTS on the rubber tubing.

DOOM

The nanoagents seem to be replicating right on schedule . . . the rest of your blood you can keep.

Now he walks over to the NANO VAT. The THREE EMPTY TUBES are now filling up - almost to the brim.

DOOM

It's time, Johnny. The human race is now officially obsolete. And you, Johnny, are here to witness the dawn of a new day . . .

(pause)

Doomsday.

DOOM pushes a METAL STAIRWAY on rollers up to the edge of the vat. He ascends the stairs slowly - *ceremonially*. He stands at the lip of the vat, staring down at the bubbling, eerily illuminated goo within . . .

. . . and STEPS IN! The colored NANOGOO in the surrounding TUBES begins to empty into the main vat. And then the level of the goo in the vat itself begins to SINK.

It's being absorbed into DOOM'S BODY. He throbs and crackles. He seems to be GROWING slightly. As he soaks up the last of the nanogoo he raises his arms in triumph and shouts . . .

DOOM

I . . . AM . . . COMPLETE!!!

CUT TO:

being held prisoner. Now,
who's stretched out on the
down at him.

I can see.

didn't have missed

see you. Let me—

is strangely unresponsive.

happened here, but I
wrong.

DOOM — looking more fearsome
be continuously PULSING —
ter its way out. His VOICE has
sounds like a chorus of TWELVE
synthesized harmony . . .

our bargain?

y.

old you they would
me now. I am

you to enjoy your
this room, I'm

behind him. His TEN FINGERS
d miraculously, the door begins to

DISAPPEAR, TRANSFORMING into a SOLID EXPANSE OF WALL!

BEN throws himself at the wall where the door was. It's pointless. He turns, sees ALICIA weeping, and wonders: *what have I done?*

EXT. BIOLAB BUILDING - DAY

As DOOM exits this low, flat structure, he pauses outside the door and PLUNGES HIS FINGERS yet again into the exterior wall. The exterior of the building begins to CHANGE – doors and windows VANISHING, brick and plaster morphing into a hardened shell of TITANIUM STEEL.

Once the process is underway it continues on its own. DOOM withdraws his fingers – LAUGHS – and sets off on a walking tour of Manhattan.

INT. BIOLAB - THAT MOMENT

JOHNNY, in his fish tank, is the only one aware enough to see what's happening. The exterior walls are continuing to transform – changing color as the building seals itself off.

But there's an unexpected side effect. As the steel seal progresses along the walls, we see it passing ELECTRICAL SOCKETS – which instantly SHORT OUT! Any equipment that's plugged into the wall CUTS ITSELF OFF as the wall transforms and cuts off the current. The OVERHEAD LIGHTS are dying one by one.

The HELMETS attached to REED and SUE'S HEADS SPARK and SHORT OUT as the wiring turns to steel. The two of them PITCH FORWARD to the floor, stunned and groggy. They come around just as the last few lights are going out – just in time to see . . .

JOHNNY

REED! SUE!

REED grabs a crowbar and manages to open a SEAM in the tank. The water begins to drain out just as they're plunged into total darkness.

Then the whole lab starts to GLOW – BRIGHT ORANGE. With the water drained, JOHNNY has enough air to BURN HIS WAY OUT of the tank! He steps out, using one hand as a torch to light the room.

JOHNNY

He screwed up, Reed. He put a shell around the building . . . thought he was pinning us in . . . but he shorted out the wiring too.

SUE

I'm so weak.

REED

We lost a lot of blood. Lot of nanoagents, too.

JOHNNY

I got enough left to get us out of here.

He raises both hands toward the ROOF – and fires an ongoing burst of FLAME that turns the steel orange, then red, then WHITE . . .

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM – THAT MOMENT

BEN and ALICIA hear the activity outside. They pound on the walls –

BEN

Hey! HELP! What's goin' on out there??

But the roar of JOHNNY'S FLAME prevents the others from hearing *them*.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE – DAY

New Yorkers like to think they've seen everything, but they've never seen anything like DR. DOOM. He's grown to eight feet tall and his metallic hide is THROBBING like crazy – not to mention throwing off sparks.

He smiles and waves at the frightened passersby. He looks up at the skyscrapers and GRINS like a tourist from Kansas. He BOPS to the beat of a streetcorner boom box. He couldn't be enjoying the city more . . . because it's about to be his, all his.

He stops at a Sabrett's cart, orders a hot dog and a pretzel. The VENDOR's hands shake so badly that he slops mustard all over himself.

VENDOR

On the house.

DOOM looks skyward. He sees a HUMAN FIREBALL soaring through the sky, headed for the Baxter Building . . . followed closely by what looks like a man on 30-STOREY STILTS, carrying a woman in his arms! He turns to the VENDOR and LAUGHS RAUCOUSLY.

DOOM

I love New York. I could just eat it up!

INT. BAXTER BLDG. – LOBBY

DOOM enters and looks at the LOBBY DIRECTORY. Since he's rather conspicuous, a SECURITY GUARD ambles up cautiously.

SECURITY GUARD

Help you, sir?

DOOM

I'm looking for the Fantastic Four.

SECURITY GUARD

That's the penthouse level, sir. Closed to the general public.

DOOM

Do I look like the general public?

With the merest flick of his hand, DOOM sends the GUARD flying across the lobby. A SECOND GUARD rushes up with his gun drawn. DOOM lets him have it with a blast of SHEER ENERGY which VAPORIZES HIM on the spot - leaving only a pair of CHARRED SHOES with the feet still in them!

INT. BAXTER BLDG. - FF HQ - A MOMENT LATER - DAY

JOHNNY, REED and SUE have had barely a moment to settle in when the private elevator opens and DOOM steps out.

JOHNNY

Victor!

DOOM

There's no more Victor. There's only Doom.

REED

All right. You've saved us the trouble of finding you. Now what do you want?

DOOM

I want what every living thing wants . . . to thrive, to reproduce, to be fruitful and multiply.
(beat)

We're family in a way. Why don't we shed these useless bodies together?

JOHNNY

Do what??

DOOM

Let's join hands. That's all it'll take. Let's join hands - and be one - with the world.

REED, SUE and JOHNNY back off instinctively as DOOM raises his arms into the air. As they watch, he begins SINKING INTO THE FLOOR . . . turning into a GREENISH CHROME PUDDLE!

The puddle begins to spread across the floor. It shoots out tendrils, like veins, that climb up the walls. EVERYTHING IT TOUCHES sizzles and

transforms - changing to the SAME GREENISH CHROME.

JOHNNY

Reed . . . what's happening here . . . ?

REED

I could be wrong, but I think he's . . . merging
with the building.

JOHNNY approaches a wall - starts to touch the spreading chrome -

REED

DON'T TOUCH IT. He'll swallow you up like
anything else!

They back toward the elevator, realizing they're being painted into a
corner. Just as SUE is about to touch the 'down' button . . .

. . . a green-chrome TENDRIL snakes out and consumes the panel.

REED

COME ON! The service elevator!

INT HALLWAY - BAXTER BLDG. - DAY

The three of them sprint toward the elevator, with the walls transforming
behind them. JOHNNY gets there first, hits the button . . . WAITS . . . and
WAITS . . . with chrome spreading closer and closer down the hallway . . .

The elevator is one floor below them when SUE spots the chrome veins
seeping up from the floorboards around the elevator door.

SUE

NO, Johnny! GET BACK!

The doors finally open. The elevator car has been transformed into a giant
MOUTH - with green chrome teeth and tongue - LAUGHING AT THEM.

JOHNNY

Great. Same old sense of humor . . .

They turn. Behind them, the green chrome walls have almost caught up.
HANDS sprout out of the wall and BECKON to them.

JOHNNY

Up or down?

REED

Up.

JOHNNY lifts both hands and BLASTS A HOLE in the ceiling above.

EXT. ROOFTOP LAUNCHING PAD - THAT MOMENT

The HOLE in the ceiling opens up a short distance from where the now-completed FANTASTICAR sits on its launching pad. JOHNNY rockets up through the hole and the elongated REED follows, carrying SUE.

They pile into the four-pod aerial vehicle, JOHNNY in the forward pod, REED and SUE flanking him on either side. JOHNNY activates the VTOL jets - but alas . . .

JOHNNY

Takes a minute to warm up.

They see VEINS OF CHROME growing over the edge of the roof . . .
CONVERGING toward the launch pad.

REED

You go, Johnny. Go ahead.

JOHNNY

Thanks, I'm enjoying the company . . .

The chrome tendrils are moments away from reaching them when the VTOL jets reach full power. The craft RISES vertically, Harrier-style . . .

CHROME TENTACLES shoot out of the roof, making one last effort to grab the Fantasticar. But the JET FLAMES CHAR the tendrils - causing them to retract, as if in severe pain.

AERIAL SHOT - ON FANTASTICAR

hurtling through the skies over Manhattan, not a moment too soon.
REED, SUE and JOHNNY look back at the Baxter Building. The top two storeys are now ENTIRELY CHROMED.

REED

He's expanding geometrically. The bigger he gets, the faster he grows.

SUE

Where does it stop?

REED

At this rate . . . he should reach ground level in fifteen, twenty minutes. Faster if he sticks to the pipes and wiring.

(beat)

After that . . . maybe a day for the rest of Manhattan. And then . . .

REED doesn't finish the thought. Doesn't have to.

JOHNNY

Reed . . . I've never gone to nova heat. But a kamikaze run, if I timed it just right . . . I could maybe vaporize the building and Doom with it.

SUE

Johnny, you'd never survive.

JOHNNY

Well, duh, Sue.

REED

It's not just you. A blast of that intensity would incinerate everyone in the five boroughs.

JOHNNY and SUE stare at REED, waiting to hear the brilliant alternative plan which he's no doubt about to suggest.

REED

Which is not to say we should rule it out . . .

WIPE TO:

INT. BIOLAB BUILDING - HALLWAY - THAT MOMENT

A BIG HOLE opens up in the plaster wall of the hallway. As it grows in size, we see through to the interior of the OBSERVATION ROOM - where BEN has dismantled the gurney. He's using one of the cross struts as a STAVE to punch his way through the wall.

When the hole is big enough, he steps through and helps ALICIA out.

BEN

Everything's dark in here!

ALICIA

Don't worry. You're with me, remember?

She takes his hand, begins feeling her way along the wall . . .

INT. BIOLAB - A FEW MINUTES LATER

BEN and ALICIA have tracked down a couple of flashlights. SUNLIGHT pours down through the hole that JOHNNY melted - thirty feet up.

BEN

There's some kind of hard metal shell around the building. Johnny musta burned that hole.

ALICIA

He can fly. How do we get out?

BEN

Goddammit . . . two days ago, I'da punched my
way outta here in ten seconds flat!

ALICIA lets out a little GASP. She's just spotted something ODD and
DISTURBING on the floor of the biolab . . .

. . . a SEVERED METAL ARM crisscrossed with TINY ORANGE VEINS!
She turns to BEN - realizes *he's* staring at it too.

BEN

There was something wrong with the stuff in
my blood.

(beat)

He got it on him. His arm froze up. He acted
like it was gonna kill him . . .

ALICIA

Ben. You have to find some way of telling the
others.

BEN gazes up at the impossibly distant HOLE IN THE ROOF. Then, as he
lowers his gaze, his eyes fall on a rack of neatly labelled TEST TUBES.

SIX of them are filled with BEN'S BLOOD.

BEN

It's still in there, Alicia. He took these samples
before he fixed me.

ALICIA

You said - before - you could punch your way
out . . .

BEN GRIMACES in sheer agony. The prospect of it all happening again is
too terrible for him to face - *almost*. TEARS begin to roll down his face.

BEN

Would it matter to you? If I was like - that -
again?

ALICIA

Ben. I love you. It never did.

She takes his face in her hands. Kisses him. He turns to DOOM'S LAB
TABLE and finds a SYRINGE . . .

VARIOUS ANGLES - NEW YORK STREETS

As the DOOM ORGANISM spreads through the streets, we see a
progression of SURREAL, HORRIFIC IMAGES:

- A SUBWAY ENTRANCE clamping shut, like a pair of GIANT JAWS, on PANICKED PASSENGERS descending the stairwall;
- A STREETLAMP bending down to grab a SCREAMING WOMAN, wrapping itself around her and HOISTING HER into the air;
- PEDESTRIANS racing to escape the spreading chrome. We see one man who TRIPS, allowing the chrome to catch up with him. It COVERS HIS ENTIRE BODY, turning him into a LIVING STATUE . . . and then DISSOLVES HIM, absorbing him into its own mass!
- A GIANT HAND growing out of the street, and SMASHING a number of oncoming cars as if it were swatting flies.
- The twin LIONS at the steps of the Public Library COMING TO LIFE, and going wild in the streets.

EXT. AERIAL SHOT - ON FANTASTICAR

As it circles helplessly above the city. JOHNNY nudges REED - off in the distance, in the general direction of PACE'S BIOLAB . . .

. . . a fiery "4" is blazing in the night sky!!

EXT. PACE'S BIOLAB - NIGHT

The Fantasticar touches down outside, where ALICIA and BEN are waiting. REED & co. are stunned to see BEN fully reverted to Thing mode.

BEN

I've got something you wanna know about,
Stretch, so let's haul ass. IT'S CLOBBERIN'
TIME!

INT. BIOLAB - NIGHT

SUE is examining DOOM's abandoned arm. Behind her, REED's got BEN hooked up to the RUBBER TUBING. His BLOOD is pumping slowly into a transparent tank of pink, highly diluted PLASMA.

JOHNNY

Reed, jeez, you're gonna drain him dry!

BEN

Go ahead, Reed. Take some more.

REED

We don't have any more time, Ben. We just have to hope the renegade agent keeps replicating in the plasma.

SUE
Is this going to work, Reed?

REED
If it doesn't, we won't be around to worry about
it . . .

AERIAL SHOT - ON FANTASTICAR - NIGHT

The streets below are beginning to quiet down - a huge chunk of the city
has turned to CHROME, and there's no other life to be seen there.

BEN mans the controls in the front pod. JOHNNY is in the rear,
shouldering a BAZOOKA-LIKE WEAPON armed with GLASS CANISTERS
OF PLASMA. He takes aim at the streets below.

REED
Johnny! Don't waste it. We have to save
everything we've got for the nerve center. We've
got to find the brain.

JOHNNY
Fine. How do we do that?

By now they're flying over the south side of the island. SUE points out
into Hudson Bay. The water is taking on a distinct chrome tint . . .

SUE
Reed. Look. The water!

REED
God. He's riding the sewage systems. Well,
that answers that question.

JOHNNY
What question?

REED
He won't stop at New York. He wants the
world.

BEN
Reed . . . you want to find the brain, right?
Well, Victor said they took his personality.
What if they've got his same asshole vanity?
(beat)
What if we call them out?

EXT. HUDSON BAY - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

The CHROME TIDE is spreading across the bay like wildfire as the replicating nanoagents are carried by the existing currents. The FANTASTICAR soars overhead, and a LOUDSPEAKER BLARES . . .

REED [filter]

DOOM! IT'S OVER. YOU'RE FINISHED,
DOOM. SHOW YOURSELF.

INT. FANTASTICAR - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

Our four heroes look on in SHEER AWE as the CHROME TIDE reaches the foot of LIBERTY ISLAND. The island is chromed . . . then the pedestal of the Statue . . . then, MISS LIBERTY HERSELF.

Her features begin to SHIFT and TRANSFORM. Within seconds, the Statue of Liberty bears the sneering countenance of DOCTOR DOOM!

DOOM

Finished? Finished? You insects!

EXT. HUDSON BAY - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

GIANT DOOM steps off his pedestal into the bay and takes a SWIPE at the soaring FANTASTICAR - like King Kong batting at biplanes.

BEN takes evasive action - then sweeps back around to BUZZ DOOM yet again. This time he's ready. With lightning speed he REACHES OUT -

INT. FANTASTICAR - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

The futuristic craft ROCKS. They've flown straight into DOOM'S HAND - and his gigantic chrome fingers are CLOSING AROUND THEM.

DOOM

I won't be finished . . . till I've had dessert!

His MAMMOTH METAL JAWS open. Our heroes are about to become a canapé. At the last possible instant REED gives the high sign . . .

REED

NOW!

And FOUR BAZOOKAS fire their glass canisters down DOOM's throat!

EXT. BAY - ON DOOM

At first he does nothing. He doesn't know what's hit him. But then he lets out an EAR-SPLITTING SCREAM which echoes all the way to Jersey.

ORANGE THREADLIKE VEINS begin to spread out of his mouth, CRISS-CROSSING HIS FACE. He lowers his hand slightly, then realizes he can't move it *at all*.

INT. FANTASTICAR - THAT MOMENT

The FF look out and see the ORANGE VEINS spreading down from DOOM'S BODY into the waters . . . becoming ORANGE RIPPLES as they fight the tide back to Manhattan.

DOOM is DONE. And he knows it. There's barely a flicker of life left in his bright-red, burning coal eyes. The last thing he sees in this world . . .

. . . is BEN GRIMM sitting in the forward pod of the Fantasticar, lighting a victory cigar, and FLIPPING HIM THE BIRD.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HUDSON BAY - DAWN

The "renegade agents" have reached Manhattan by now, and the Doom Organism is pretty much frozen out. But our exhausted heroes are in no hurry to leave. They SIT THERE in DOOM'S PALM, enjoying the sunrise.

BEN

Sorry, guys. My bad.

JOHNNY

Aah, you can't help being stupid.

REED

This is difficult for me to assimilate.

SUE

What's that, Reed?

REED

We aren't ordinary people. We're heroes.

EXT. CHURCH STEPS - DAY

The HUMAN TORCH flies out of the church door in a hail of rice. Newlyweds REED and SUE are next - followed by best man BEN GRIMM in his monstrously oversized tuxedo, with the radiant ALICIA on his arm.

JOHNNY skywrites "GOOD LUCK REED AND SUE" as the honeymoon car drives off. Flashbulbs pop. BEN gestures to a PHOTOGRAPHER . . .

BEN

This is my good side.

INT. HONEYMOON HOTEL - NIGHT

REED stretched out in his honeymoon bed, seemingly alone, wearing a look of profound contentment.

SUE'S VOICE

Guess what?

REED turns and looks at the depression in the PILLOW beside him.

REED

What?

SUE'S VOICE

I'm smiling.

REED

Let me see.

SUE'S VOICE

No.

REED

Let me see!

SUE'S VOICE

No! . . . Baby? You were -

REED

Yeah, I know. Fantastic.

GRINNING, REED grabs his invisible wife and the two of them go tussling under the covers as we

FADE OUT.